

Our Inspirer

An Offering of Love



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

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*A dedication to Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati,
inspirer of seekers the world over*



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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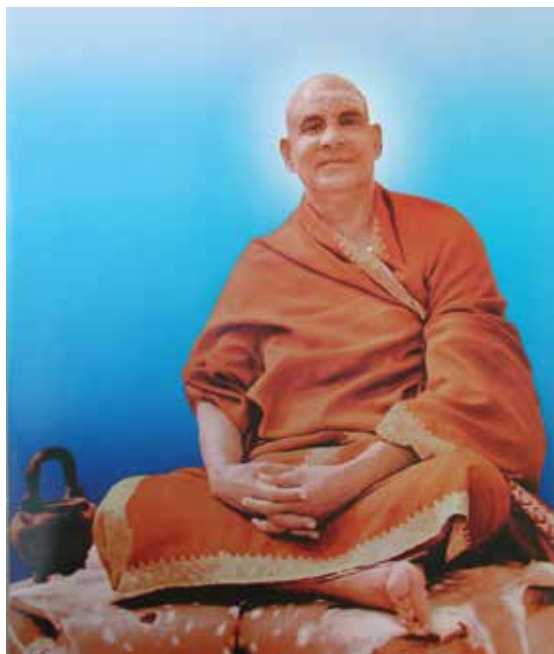
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

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Swami Satyananda Saraswati

(1923–2009)

Swami Satyananda Saraswati was born in 1923 in Almora, Uttaranchal, into a family of farmers. His ancestors were warriors and many of his kith and kin down the line, including his father, served in the army and police force.

However, it became evident that Sri Swamiji had a different bent of mind, as he began to have spiritual experiences at the age of six, when his awareness spontaneously left the body and he saw himself lying motionless on the floor. Many saints and sadhus blessed him and reassured his parents that he had a very developed awareness. This experience of disembodied awareness continued, which led him to many saints of that time such as Anandamayi Ma. Sri Swamiji also met a tantric bhairavi, Sukhman Giri, who gave him shaktipat and directed him to find a guru in order to stabilize his spiritual experiences.

At the age of 18, he renounced his home and went in search of a guru. This search ultimately led him to Swami Sivananda Saraswati at Rishikesh in 1943, who initiated him into the Dashnam Order of Sannyasa on 12th September 1947 on the banks of the Ganga and gave him the name of Swami Satyananda Saraswati.

In those early years at Rishikesh, Sri Swamiji immersed himself in guru seva. At that time the ashram was still in its infancy and even the basic amenities such as buildings and toilets were absent. The forests surrounding the small ashram were infested with snakes, scorpions, mosquitoes,

monkeys and even tigers. The ashram work too was heavy and hard, requiring Sri Swamiji to toil like a labourer carrying bucket loads of water from the Ganga up to the ashram and digging canals from the high mountain streams down to the ashram many kilometres away, in order to store water for constructing the ashram.

Rishikesh was then a small town and all the ashram requirements had to be brought by foot from far away. In addition there were varied duties, including the daily pooja at Vishwanath Mandir, for which Sri Swamiji would go into the dense forests to collect bael leaves. If anyone fell sick there was no medical care and no one to attend to them. All the sannyasins had to go out for bhiksha or alms as the ashram did not have a mess or kitchen.

Of that glorious time when he lived and served his guru, Sri Swamiji says that it was a period of total communion and surrender to the guru tattwa, whereby he felt that just to hear, speak of or see Swami Sivananda was yoga. But most of all through his nishkama seva he gained an enlightened understanding of the secrets of spiritual life and became an authority on yoga, tantra, Vedanta, Samkhya and kundalini yoga. Swami Sivananda said of Swami Satyananda, “Few would exhibit such intense vairagya at such an early age. Swami Satyananda is full of Nachiketa vairagya.”

Although he had a photographic memory, a keen intellect, and his guru described him as a versatile genius, Swami Satyananda’s learning did not come from books and study in the ashram. His knowledge unfolded from within through his untiring seva as well as his abiding faith and love for Swami Sivananda, who told him, “Work hard and you will be purified. You do not have to search for the light; the light will unfold from within you.”

In 1956, after spending twelve years in guru seva, Swami Satyananda set out as a wanderer, *parivrajaka*. Before his departure Swami Sivananda taught him kriya yoga and gave him the mission to “spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore”.

As a wandering sannyasin, Swami Satyananda travelled extensively by foot, car, train and sometimes even by camel throughout India, Afghanistan, Burma, Nepal, Tibet, Ceylon and the entire Asian subcontinent. During his sojourns, he met people from all strata of society and began formulating his ideas on how to spread the yogic techniques. Although his formal education and spiritual tradition was that of Vedanta, the task of disseminating yoga became his movement.

His mission unfolded before him in 1962 when he founded the International Yoga Fellowship Movement with the aim of creating a global fraternity of yoga. Because his mission was revealed to him in Munger, Bihar, he established the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger. Before long his teachings were rapidly spreading throughout the world. From 1963 to 1982, Swami Satyananda took yoga to each and every corner of the world, to people of every caste, creed, religion and nationality. He guided millions of seekers in all continents and established centres and ashrams in different countries.

His frequent travel took him to Australia, New Zealand, Japan, China, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, USA, England, Ireland, France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Russia, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Dubai, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Colombia, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina, Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico, Sudan, Egypt, Nairobi, Ghana, Mauritius, Alaska and Iceland. One can easily say that Sri Swamiji hoisted the flag of yoga in every nook and cranny of the world.

Nowhere did he face opposition, resistance or criticism. His way was unique. Well-versed in all religions and scriptures, he incorporated their wisdom with such a natural flair that people of all faiths were drawn to him. His teaching was not just confined to yoga but covered the wisdom of many millennia.

Sri Swamiji brought to light the knowledge of tantra, the mother of all philosophies, the sublime truths of Vedanta, the Upanishads and Puranas, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism,

Zoroastrianism, Islam and Christianity, including a modern scientific analysis of matter and creation. He interpreted, explained and gave precise, accurate and systematic explanations of the ancient systems of tantra and yoga, revealing practices hitherto unknown.

It can be said that Sri Swamiji was a pioneer in the field of yoga because his presentation had a novelty and freshness. Ajapa japa, antar mouna, pawanmuktasana, kriya yoga and prana vidya are just some of the practices which he introduced in such a methodical and simple manner that it became possible for everyone to delve into this valuable and hitherto inaccessible science for their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual development.

Yoga nidra was Sri Swamiji's interpretation of the tantric system of nyasa. With his deep insight into this knowledge, he was able to realize the potential of this practice of nyasa in a manner which gave it a practical utility for each and every individual, rather than just remaining a prerequisite for worship. Yoga nidra is but one example of his acumen and penetrating insight into the ancient systems.

Sri Swamiji's outlook was inspiring, uplifting as well as in-depth and penetrating. Yet his language and explanations were always simple and easy to comprehend. During this period he authored over eighty books on yoga and tantra which, due to their authenticity, are accepted as textbooks in schools and universities throughout the world. These books have been translated into Italian, German, Spanish, Russian, Yugoslavian, Chinese, French, Greek, Iranian and most other prominent languages of the world.

People took to his ideas and spiritual seekers of all faiths and nationalities flocked to him. He initiated thousands into mantra and sannyasa, sowing in them the seed to live the divine life. He exhibited tremendous zeal and energy in spreading the light of yoga, and in the short span of twenty years Sri Swamiji fulfilled the mandate of his guru.

Thus, by 1983, Swami Satyananda's tireless efforts to spread the message of yoga had touched the whole world.

He had also trained a core of sannyasins to transmit the yogic techniques for different needs and cultures, and they had established many Satyananda Yoga ashrams, schools and centres around India and the world. Bihar School of Yoga was well established and recognized throughout the world as a reputed and authentic centre for learning yoga and the spiritual sciences. More than that, yoga had moved out of the caves of hermits and ascetics into the mainstream of society. Whether in hospitals, jails, schools, colleges, business houses, the sporting and fashion arenas, the army or navy, yoga was in demand. Scientific research into yogic techniques was being conducted all over the world. Professionals such as lawyers, engineers, doctors, business magnates and professors were incorporating yoga into their lives. So too were the masses. Yoga had become a household word.

Now, at the peak of his accomplishment, Sri Swamiji renounced all that he created. He appointed Swami Niranjanananda as his successor and gave him the mandate to continue the work, and then began to gradually withdraw from the teaching and administering of the yoga movement. In 1988, Sri Swamiji renounced disciples, establishments and institutions, and departed from Munger, never to return again. He went on a pilgrimage through the *siddha teerthas*, spiritual centres of India as a mendicant, without any personal belonging or assistance from the ashram or institutions he had founded.

At Tryambakeshwar, before the jyotirlingam of Lord Mrityunjaya, his ishta devata, he renounced his garb and lived as an avadhoota. And here, at the source of the Godavari River near Neel Parbat, while performing chaturmas anushthana, his future place of abode and sadhana were revealed to him. He received the mandate for a new mission, to progress toward the cosmic dimension through unbroken remembrance and repetition of the Lord's name with every breath. On 8th September, 1989, birthday of his guru Swami Sivananda, he heard the voice loud and clear: "Chitabhoomi", and saw a vision of the place where he was intended to go.

Swami Satyananda did not choose Rikhia, it was chosen for him. After leaving Munger, while roaming the length and breadth of India, he came across many beautiful places where he was invited to take up residence. But in keeping with his style of surrender he awaited the mandate of his ishta and guru, which guided him to the small nondescript, unknown village of Rikhia, on the outskirts of Baba Baidyanath Dham in Deoghar, Jharkhand, the chitabhoomi or cremation ground of Sati, consort of Shiva.

Sri Swamiji arrived at Rikhia on 23rd September 1989, at midday, the day of vernal equinox, when nature is in perfect balance as the day and night are equal. Soon after, he lit a dhuni or fire and called it Mahakal Chita Dhuni. Lighting a dhuni is a very ancient tradition among sadhus. It is believed that the ash from a sadhu's dhuni is very potent, for his entire day is spent in front of the dhuni and all his acts are performed with the fire as witness.

The Rikhia that Swami Satyananda arrived in was still living in the sixteenth century. There were no roads, electricity, telephones, newspapers, television or shops. However, its vibrations were pure and spiritual providing an ideal climate for the seclusion which he imposed on himself. He began a life of intensive spiritual practice, entering the lifestyle of paramahansas who do not work for their flock and mission alone, but have a universal vision. His first anushtana commenced in 1989 during Ashwin Navaratri – the performance of *ashtottar-shat-laksh*, 108 lakh mantra purascharana which took him three hundred days to complete. He gave up the geru cloth and donned the *kaupēen*, loin cloth, an important hallmark in the life of a sadhu denoting that vairagya and dispassion are an inherent part of his being. He no longer associated with any institutions, nor gave diksha, upadesha or received dakshina, but remained in seclusion and sadhana.

In a conclusive message, he told all, “I have nothing more to say to anyone and no further guidance to give. For over twenty years I have lived with the people answering

their questions and helping them on their spiritual path. Now I withdraw my responsibility. Those who are receptive, they will surely benefit from what I have told them, but those who are not, they will now have to find their own way.”

In 1990 he designated the sadhana sthal as Sri Panch Dashnam Paramahansa Alakh Bara, denoting it as a place where a sannyasin who has perfected himself consolidates his learning and gives it momentum to attain greater spiritual heights. The *ishta devi*, presiding goddess, of the akhara was established as Tulsi Ma, the benevolent force presiding over all spheres. Now Sri Swamiji undertook the vow of *panchagni*, the five-fire austerity, in which he performed higher sadhanas sitting before five blazing fires outdoors during the hottest months of the year. The vow culminated in 1998. The fire lit by Sri Swamiji is still burning at Rikhiapeeth and is worshipped daily at sunrise and sunset with aromatic herbs amidst the chanting of vedic mantras.

In 1991, Swami Satyananda received another divine mandate: “Take care of your neighbours as I have taken care of you.” Seeking to strike a balance between the personal aspect of spiritual liberation and the social aspect of helping others, he gave Swami Niranjanananda a new task for Sivananda Math: service to and improvement of the living conditions of the tribal people in the thousands of villages surrounding Rikhiadham. Thus, from 1991 onwards, Sivananda Math undertook to finance and construct homes for the homeless, provide for clean drinking water, essential medical facilities, free clothing and household items. In the second phase of assistance, means of sustainable livelihood were provided.

In 1994, in a month-long darshan, Sri Swamiji gave a new message, of bhakti yoga. He said that the purpose of human life is to realize God through love and to serve God by helping humanity. He prophesied that while hatha yoga and raja yoga were the panacea of the twentieth century, devotion to God and bhakti yoga would be the panacea of the twenty-first.

In 1995, Sri Swamiji held the first Sat Chandi Maha Yajna, invoking the Cosmic Mother through a tantric ceremony hitherto not witnessed by common people. During this event, Sri Swamiji also passed on his spiritual and sannyasa sankalpa to Swami Niranjanananda.

In 1996, the annual event included Rama Naam Aradhana and Sita-Rama Vivaha, and in 1997, Sri Swamiji declared it as Sita Kalyanam. In 2001, for the first time he revealed that the yajna was part of the 12-year Rajasooya Yajna, a ceremony that is traditionally performed by a conqueror.

“I am performing the Rajasooya Yajna not as a conqueror of land, wealth or people, but because I was able to establish an empire of yoga, which is the need of today in our civilization,” said Sri Swamiji. “Yoga works at the spiritual, mental and physical levels to improve the quality of life, and that is also the concept of prosperity in today’s society. We have wealth, but we lack quality of life and peace of mind. I am performing the Rajasooya Yajna to re-establish peace of mind, to re-equip people with the riches of contentment, happiness, joy and wellbeing.”

In 1998, Sri Swamiji also inspired Sivananda Math to undertake an education project. Thus scholarships were given to deserving students of Rikhia panchayat with special emphasis on the education of girls. English classes were also started at the ashram. By 2001, nearly all eligible children aged between 6–12 years of Rikhia Panchayat had been adopted into the ever-expanding family of Swami Satyananda. In 2003, computer training was started. The girls, called *kanyas*, were also taught chanting of Sanskrit stotras. The boys, *batuks*, were simultaneously introduced to *Gayatri* mantra, *Bhagavad Gita*, surya namaskara, and rituals of havan and worship. Today these little children confidently conduct all the ceremonies and rituals at Rikhiapeeth before thousands of devotees who come to participate in these events.

In 2004, Sivananda Ashram was formed with the main thrust of looking after the elderly and infirm, including

widows. It has also undertaken a project to provide one wholesome meal a day to the children and elderly of Rikhia panchayat.

Thus, in a short span of time, a silent revolution has taken place in Rikhia. It was all made possible by a sannnyasin who came to this place to live in solitude. Sri Swamiji says, “After coming to Rikhia my cataracted vision was corrected. I have lived a spiritual life for more than sixty years. I have practised every form of yoga, but ultimately I found that when I began to think about others, God began to think about me. On my guru’s instructions, I lit the flame of yoga in Munger and the light of seva in Rikhia. This is the requirement of humanity today.”

In 2007, Sri Swamiji announced the formation of Rikhia-peeth. He said, “The Rikhia ashram will now be known as Rikhiapeeth. *Peeth* means ‘seat’, an apt term for Rikhia as the instructions given to me by Swami Sivananda have culminated and fructified here. Rikhia is an ashram in the original sense of the word because here a lifestyle is lived. Swami Satyasangananda is the Peethadhishwari of Rikhiapeeth and has been given the sankalpa that the three cardinal teachings of Swami Sivananda, serve, love and give, will be practised and lived here. This is the future vision of Rikhiapeeth.”

In 2009, after participating in and giving darshan during Sat Chandi Mahayajna and Yoga Poornima where Sri Swamiji inspired everyone to lead the righteous life and bid final farewell to the thousands who had gathered to participate in these events, he entered into Mahasamadhi at midnight of 5th December and merged into Swami Sivananda, our Sadguru.

Introduction

I will inspire you and that inspiration is love.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Devotees from around the world have offered personal recollections of their relationship with Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati. These testimonies speak of the first glimpse, the first encounter and the life-changing impact of their relationship with Sri Swamiji. Lives were turned upside-down, and a direction was given to those who had none.

Funny anecdotes, intimate feelings and experiences beyond the realm of reason paint a multi-hued portrait of this extraordinary person who was greater than life, whose all-embracing affection and awareness were expressed in so many different ways which touched everyone to the core of their being.

Immense gratitude is the first sentiment which fills these pages, gratitude for having known Sri Swami Satyananda and having received his continuous care and guidance. The second sentiment which comes alive is inspiration. People felt encouraged and inspired by Sri Swamiji to grow towards a life of goodness and service and that inspiration remains an unshakeable anchor until today. Sri Swamiji could see each person's needs and was able to empower them to fulfil those needs and at the same time embark on their spiritual journey.

Our Inspirer is dedicated to the memory of Sri Swami Satyananda and to all those aspirants who came in contact with him. It is also dedicated to future generations who have not had the privilege of knowing Sri Swami Satyananda personally, but who will be inspired to tread the path he has shown.

The Geru Glow

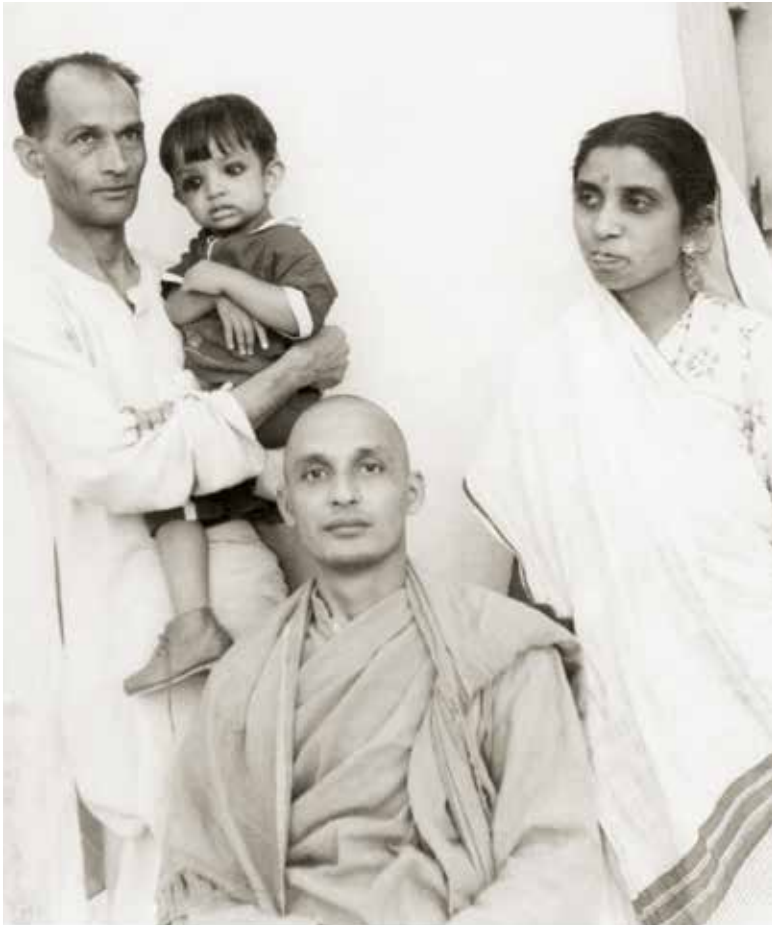
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

I am going to tell you of my first memory of Sri Swamiji which goes back to when I must have been approximately two and a half years old. I saw somebody seated and I was holding on to the shoulders of that person with my little hands. Everywhere around me there was this beautiful orange glow enveloping me. I recalled this memory many years later and told Swami Dharmashakti about it.

Then she recalled that in 1962, around the month of May, Sri Swamiji had come to Rajnandgaon and stayed at our house for about twenty days. At that time, Swami Satyavrat and Swami Dharmashakti were formalizing the bylaws and the rules of the International Yoga Fellowship Movement, and they were also starting the publication of the *Yoga* and *Yogavidya* magazines. In the evenings Sri Swamiji would give satsang on the premises of the local industry, known as BNC Mills, the Bengal Nagpur Cotton mills. It was the industry where my father used to work. Sri Swamiji used to give satsang to all the officers and workers of the industry.

One day, when Sri Swamiji was giving satsang, they had taken me along and let me run free. So what I had done was, I had climbed onto the *chowkie* or bed on which Sri Swamiji was seated. He had his dhoti wrapped around his shoulders; it was a warm summer evening. I had gone under his upper cloth dhoti and was holding onto his back. The dhoti had covered me completely. I was inside, holding

onto the bare body of Sri Swamiji with my little hands, and because the dhoti was around me, the light filtering through was geru-ish and that was my memory: I was surrounded by a very beautiful glow of geru. I was touching the bare body of somebody, which I later realized was Sri Swamiji. As I was holding him, trying to stand up or crawl my way up, my hands would tickle him. This was the story that Swami Dharmashakti told me.



SWAMI SHANKARANANDA SARASWATI

India

Born in 1928 in Bihar, India, Swami Shankarananda Saraswati has been associated with Sri Swamiji and BSY since 1965. Receiving mantra diksha in 1967, he continued to visit the ashram while serving in the Government of Bihar in the Department of Secondary Education until his retirement in 1987. He has worked tirelessly for BSY, conducting classes and seminars as also contributing to the editing of the Hindi publications. He came to live at Ganga Darshan in 1990 and received poorna sannyasa from Swami Niranjanananda in 1992. He was actively involved in Bihar Yoga Bharati as its Chief Director. He is presently living in Patna.

My relationship with Sri Swamiji began in 1965 when I had my first darshan. In 1965, Sri Swamiji had organized the third World Yoga Convention in Munger which was held in the hall of the Sivanandashram in Lal Darwaja. A friend told me, “There is a sannyasin in Munger who runs an ashram and they are going to hold a convention. If you would like to attend, you can come along.” I said, “Fine, I’ll come.” At that time the delegate fee was only fifteen rupees for seven days. I paid up and became a delegate. I would go every morning and return in the evening. On my first evening, I had Sri Swamiji’s darshan for the first time. It felt like ‘I was destined to come here and now I have arrived’. What happened in those seven days of the convention are lost to me because I only kept looking at Sri Swamiji, waiting for him to speak.

When the function ended, my children said that they would like to learn yoga and I told Sri Swamiji about this. In those days there were fifteen-day courses conducted by Sri Swamiji himself. In the morning, the whole family would come to attend the classes. During that period, certain problems arose in my office as well as some family-related issues which were causing quite a lot of concern and difficulty. I thought that I would ask Sri Swamiji about these matters. In those days Sri Swamiji would give darshan in the room beside the hall. We went in and I sat in the farthest corner. The satsang was in progress with about ten to fifteen people. During the satsang he said, “Premchaitanya, are you listening?” Sri Swamiji had already given me the name ‘Premchaitanya’ and then he carried on. Later he called out my name again and asked, “Are you listening?” When we came out, my wife and I looked at each other. She presumed that I had told Sri Swamiji all about our problems and I thought it was she who had done so. I received answers to all my questions in exactly the same sequence which were in my mind. That was the first meeting!



After that, I visited the ashram regularly and I would ask Sri Swamiji for sannyasa but he would keep putting it off. Once when I insisted, he said, “Your blanket is wet. Unless it dries, how can you use it?” I had three daughters and one son. So, I had to wait until I had fulfilled my responsibilities. In 1988 Sri Swamiji left Ganga Darshan. At that time, I was posted in a



town far away from Munger and it was very difficult for me to take time off. Eventually in August or September of 1990 I had the opportunity to go to Deoghar. I did not know of Sri Swamiji's whereabouts at the time. At the railway station in Jasidih, I saw Swami Gorakhnath. When I asked him what had brought him there, he told me he had come to meet Sri Swamiji in the Akhara. I asked, “Does Sri Swamiji live here?” He replied, “Yes.” Since I was accompanied by many other people, I could not change my plans and returned to Patna.

I made special plans and in November I went to Rikhiya. When I reached the gate, it was open. The sannyasin at the gate was known to me and though he greeted me, he said that entry would not be possible. He asked me to come back the next morning at 8.30 am and I returned to Deoghar. The next morning when I got there, the gate was open and Sri Swamiji was standing right there. He took me into his *kutiya* where the Samadhi Sthal now stands. Sri Swamiji sat on a raised cement platform, I sat across from him and Swami Niranjan was seated beside him. After enquiring after the health of my children, Sri Swamiji said, “I have left everything behind. I am no longer a guru. I have no disciples. I have no relationship with anyone anymore. I have come here to do my sadhana.” He said the same thing a few times in different ways. I was quite open and frank with Sri

Swamiji and asked him, “Sri Swamiji, fine. You have decided you don’t want anything but what about us? Where should we go?” Immediately he pointed to Swami Niranjan, “He needs you and you need him.”

There is an incident I recall from about 1973. Sri Swamiji was returning from a trip abroad. I was in Patna those days. A friend of mine told me that Sri Swamiji was flying into Patna and asked if I would like to go and meet him. I said, “Sure.” The airport was about eight kilometres away and I went just as I was, in a T-shirt and dhoti with a shawl wrapped around me. After the plane landed and he came outside, I offered him my pranams. He asked me, “Are you coming with me?” There was no need for a reply. He said, “Sit.” I sat in the car and we drove out of the airport. I thought the organizers would have made arrangements for refreshments somewhere and that we would soon stop. However, the car drove out of Patna city and towards what I thought was Munger.

When we were near Bakhtiyarpur, about two hours out of Patna, he said, “Give me your hand.” I was sitting in front and Sri Swamiji was in the back. He took my hand in his hand and said, “From today, your name is Shankarananda.” At that very moment the car was at a railway crossing. I did not ask him anything and he did not say anything else either. We kept going and finally arrived at the Dhanbad ashram. After halting there for two hours, we left and it was already dark. We drove all night through miles of jungle in Jharkhand, arriving in Raipur the next day. He had still not said anything and I did not ask him anything either. In Raipur, after having breakfast we headed for Rajnandgaon. It was only when we got there that he said, “Rest for a while.” I was given a room while he attended to some office work and other matters.

The next morning, we set off and drove straight to Munger. I was standing around idly after finishing breakfast and Sri Swamiji asked me, “Are you not going?”

“Where?” I asked.

“Patna?”

“Do I have to return? You have given me diksha now. You have given me a name. Where do I go now?”

“No, no. You have to go back. You have to go back. Catch this train.” And that was that.

I finally returned to Patna after an absence of five days. When I went to the office, no one asked me where I had been. I used to hold a very important position at that time but to this day, I don't understand what happened. My superior was quite close to me. She would first discuss things with me and only then pass an order. When she called me to her office to deal with some files, even she did not ask me where I had been. There were five or six clerks, three to four officers and the superior but none of them asked me, ‘Where have you been for these five days?’

It was nothing but the grace and mystery of Sri Swamiji's leela!



SWAMI YOGABHAKTI SARASWATI

France

Born in 1934 in Paris, France, Swami Yogabhakti first met Swami Satyananda in 1968, marking the start of a long and fruitful association with yoga which continues to this day. She introduced yoga in schools in 1973 and founded Research on Yoga in Education (RYE) which became instrumental in taking yoga to schools. In 2000, Swami Nirananjanananda presided over the creation of EURYE, a federation of RYE organizations from all over Europe. This event which was held at the UNESCO drew the attention of people from around the world. In 2013, the French Ministry of education issued an official decree entitling RYE (France) to teach yoga techniques from kindergarten to university. Swami Yogabhakti has also translated nine important BSY texts into French. She was initiated into karma sannyasa by Sri Swamiji and received poorna sannyasa from Swami Nirananjanananda in 2001. Currently she resides in Paris and continues to work for Satyananda Yoga the world over.

I met Sri Swamiji on his first World Tour in July 1968 when he came to Paris. At the time there was a swami called Swami Devatmananda who had been engaged in the 9-month Yoga Teacher Training in Munger. She invited him to France and also invited me and other people involved in yoga to meet him.

I had been practising yoga for about five years in the way that most people did at the time, a class once a week. But even that was enough to make me aware of how much it

helped me in my job as a teacher. I was very eager to learn about the background, the philosophy of yoga but it was something that I had not been able to find. I had attended lectures given by other spiritual people but when I met Sri Swamiji, I realized that he was very different. Compared to the other swamis I had heard or seen who looked very dignified and ascetic, when he came into the room, he looked happy. When someone asked funny questions, he laughed. He did not contradict them, instead he made you feel that the question was interesting even though it might have been quite stupid. At that time, I was immersed in academics and writing my PhD on American literature. The idea that I needed a guru was very far from me. I enjoyed listening to Sri Swamiji as a narrator and an exponent of the philosophy of yoga which, coming from him, I found extremely interesting.

He expressed himself in a way that made difficult things easy to understand and he did not use any paper or other aids to illustrate his views. One day he spoke about ida and pingala and said that they were the two important realities on earth. I said, "That is very interesting but what is it really?" He continued. "Imagine that you take a wire from the electrical connection here. You open it and you find two wires, one red and one blue. If they are not connected, then electricity cannot come through. We are also traversed by bio-electricity and when the two currents, the red and the blue, coincide then you are in good health, you have balance. And that is what you gain through the practice of yoga." I said, "That's great!" I immediately understood the most important thing about ida and pingala.

He spoke about *Om* and said that it was a very important syllable which was a mantra. Well, fancy that! I was listening and hearing this for the first time. I said, "That's interesting. When you call someone *Guill'aume* or *Jer'ôme*, is it a good thing?" He laughed. It was funny, of course, and I really appreciated his reactions. I was new to yoga, like a bird just fallen from the nest. I did not know anything but I was

so impressed by *Om* that I told a friend of mine who was pregnant, 'Call the baby Guillaume'.

When Sri Swamiji laughed, it impressed me a lot. The other swamis I had seen before used to say, "Be pure. Don't eat this or that. Don't mix with people who are not good." I thought that I was a teacher and I work in a school. How can I avoid meeting people who are not good, how can I even recognize it? Sri Swamiji was the type of person who accepted differences. By temperament, I also accept the world as it is and I make the most of it. I don't want to evade what cannot be evaded, but just work with it. And that I appreciated in him.

I was an English teacher and I was asked to be his interpreter whenever he went to French-speaking countries, even Morocco. I learnt a lot in this way because everything he said passed through me. I didn't think how to translate anything specifically; it just came out. I learnt many things directly, indirectly and also sideways. One day I had an appointment with him. When I arrived, he was finishing an interview with another swami and he was telling her, "Remember, if you take to yoga because you want to flee from the world, you will never be a good yogi." There was no reason for me to think that this was for me but still I understood something – that you have to keep a balance between the world and yoga. Yoga could be applied to the world also.

Another time there was a big queue of people who wanted to have an interview with him and I was translating the questions. One lady was saying to him, "I am a yoga teacher and I have had a breakdown. I feel completely depressed and yet I know yoga, I transmit yoga and so I would like to know why." He said, "Stop," and then he closed his eyes. When he opened his eyes, he asked her, "Do you demonstrate the postures yourself while teaching?" She said, "Yes, of course!" He said, "That's the cause of your depression. You give many classes a week, you are tired and you should have someone else do the postures and

you describe them.” In this way, I learned something about teaching! I learned yoga in many, many ways from him.

Once we had organized a seminar in Chamarande in a beautiful old house on the grounds of a beautiful park. One day we all came out of the hall after the seminar and were walking behind him. Suddenly a train passed near this beautiful park. There was an opening in the hedge and Sri Swamiji looked at it, just like we did – apparently! Then he turned around and said, “Oh, that was a goods train and it had fourteen wagons.” Imagine! We were only looking at something passing by and he had managed to see that it was carrying goods and had fourteen wagons. He was always on the alert. When he saw something he looked at it, he observed it and he showed us how not to let your mind think whatever it likes but to train it. A sort of hygiene of the mind, ‘Don’t let it go anywhere and weaken’. To have the brain working on something precise is a good lesson to prevent the mind from romping about anywhere as it pleases. That is good advice he gave us out of the classroom, sideways, on our way to lunch. That is how we learnt from him.

I did not feel that he was my guru until I introduced yoga into my English classes. It was very successful with the children and I wondered if it was right to teach yoga in a French school. Since I had a long summer holiday, I decided to go and meet him in Munger. I told him about my work as a researcher on American literature. When he asked me who I was writing on and I replied, “Thoreau, an American,” he said, “Oh I know him.” He even quoted him: “Most people live a life of quiet desperation.” I said, “That’s incredible! He is a scholar.” This impressed me very much. I said that I had introduced yoga into my school and that I would like to know if it is correct to introduce this remarkable science into French institutions. He said, “Yes!” I felt I had got the advice of a sage and that started a new era for me.

It was in the old ashram in Munger that I realized he was my guru. It had taken five years but it was worthwhile because afterwards we communicated with each other a lot.

To assist in his dissemination of *Yoga Nidra*, I wrote a book in French which included five of his yoga nidra practices along with a short biography to introduce him to the French public. I gave training in yoga nidra and he also encouraged me to go to different places and explain what I was doing. This lasted for a few years. During that time, though I never stayed for very long periods in Munger, I imbibed a lot.

In the 70s, I was lucky enough to have a school principal who was a very wise woman, interested in philosophy and knowledge from other places. One day I gave her a yoga class and she asked, "Who taught you that?" I said, "My mentor, my master, Swami Satyananda." She said that she would like to invite him to College Condorcet in Paris. So here he was, in the 70s, dressed in *geru* with a shaven head, sitting in padmasana on a table! Invitations had been sent to all the teachers of the school, the parents and also journalists. The children demonstrated yoga practices in the school hall.

When Sri Swamiji met these new people, he was very much at ease, not at all stressed. In fact, I never saw him stressed. On the contrary, when I was stressed about so many people to be invited and organizing the place for the program, he himself would walk into the place in an easy



relaxed manner. I thought, "Why should I be stressed?"

He was a perfect example of complete relaxation. It was the same with the French public. People asked all sorts of questions and he answered naturally. He was very successful. He was a great yogi and great yogis do not depend on things from the outside. It is all about self-education and discipline, self-regulation and self-confidence.

The greatest lesson I have learned from him is that the teacher exerts an influence through his or her state of being. I devised a lot of exercises in yoga nidra and hatha yoga, made childrens' games from practices of yoga. I realized that the optimum success of a teacher would be not to do any exercises, but upon entering the classroom the children would feel relaxed because the teacher was relaxed. I think the most important thing is the experience and the degree to which the teacher has imbibed that knowledge. To me, Sri Swamiji embodied that and much more than I could ever imagine. He looked like anybody else at the start but went onto becoming the 'Conqueror of the World' when he introduced yoga to the people. He created a yogic renaissance. He categorized everything and made it into a science. He must have had special powers for that and special confidence in himself and his own powers. And of course, he worked very hard.

What impressed me the most was his happiness and his way to enjoy life. For instance, when he came to France we prepared vegetarian food, no meat or anything, but once someone offered him champagne. "Yes, that is the blood of France," he said and drank some. We enjoyed him behaving in that way and he gave us the feeling that he could adapt to any situation. I told my friends that Sri Swamiji has got the three A's – Adjust, Adapt, Accommodate – and exactly that is what I was doing at school.

My principal was told by the parents that the teacher was wasting time, she was paid by the Ministry to teach English and she was teaching gymnastics! What to do? So I thought that maybe when people criticize you, that's what Sri Swamiji often said, "Listen to criticism. Listen to critics." I thought, 'Maybe they are right because if I teach something for which I am not paid for, it means that it is not English. Maybe I could teach yoga in English'. Then I started teaching 'right hand thumb', 'second finger' and so on, that was the first rotation of consciousness, saying it in English followed by French.

On the second day, without the French translation, the children followed very well. The third day, they understood every part of the body in English and now what could the parents say? I was teaching English, basic things like vocabulary for the body, the parents could not say that I was wasting my time because in the second year, the children knew things which they might have learnt at the university. ‘Shoulder blades’ – you don’t learn that at school. You see, that’s what I learnt from him. To adapt, to listen and not to get angry at what people say, take it into account, maybe there is something there. That is how I progressed.

When I heard that he had retired in 1988, it was a shock. I had been used to visiting and when I decided to go to Munger, people told me he was no longer here. Someone told me that he was in Bombay so I flew to Bombay and asked a friend where he was. I was told that he was in a place called Deoghar and also that Sri Swamiji did not want any disciples any more. Up to now he had been very open and kind to all his disciples, including me, but I could not imagine that he had retired. When I arrived there, I found Swami Satsangi who said, “Oh, here you are! Come.” She showed me the small hut where he was staying. I felt very strange there. He asked a swami to make me some tea and then said, “As soon as she drinks it, she goes away.” So I drank very slowly! After that I realized that the situation had changed and that Sri Swamiji wished to live by himself, that we should not bother him.

But what about the feeling inside? Somehow I had to rearrange my relationship and it came very, very slowly. Afterwards it dawned on me that it was not necessary to live with the guru, near the guru all the time. I realized that the guru was inside me, he had helped me to recover and it made me grow. Subsequently whenever I met him again, it was very easy for me. I found him changed, of course, but still the same somehow. My feelings were that once you come to terms with yourself then the guru is always present, he does not have to be geographically present wherever you are. It took me sometime but things settled.

I was in Paris when I heard about the mahasamadhi. Some friends and I met at my place and I did not come to India immediately. I wanted to live this moment with myself and I did get the assurance that things were fine, that life would continue with him and since then I have not lived outside his presence.

When I come to Rikhia or Ganga Darshan, I find that Sri Swamiji has prepared his departure so well with Rikhia and Swami Satsangi and with Munger and Swami Niranjan. It is very rare to see that after a sage, a great yogi, a guru departs that there is no trouble between the disciples. He had arranged things so beautifully. I had read that even after the departure of Buddha, there was so much trouble between his disciples. But here it is all right. He chose his successor when he was just a baby and Swami Niranjan is perfect for that. I have the feeling that I am at the right place with the right guru.

I always thought that Sri Swamiji had a gift for deciphering the mission of people. I remember the time when I accepted to devote my time to the mission he gave me – introducing yoga into schools. He said, “One day, yoga will be accepted in all schools in the world.” It is not yet the case but it will happen. One of the big questions that I ask myself is ‘how do people see the soul?’ The soul is something abstract, the body you can see, but the soul, how can you see it? You cannot say ‘I see the soul of somebody’ but there are some sages who can see. What do they see? The head or the heart? When they see the soul, they immediately know what the person has got to do and Sri Swamiji had that gift. That is why when he felt that somebody had the capacity to either write a book or to do something



special, because everybody has got a different call in life, he immediately gave that person the mahaprana, the capacity to do it. Probably, like a plug, plug in the prana into that person. When it is finished, you can unplug so that person can relax!

That is what I felt with Sri Swamiji. He gave the people he came in contact with that strength and force to do something they had to do, not only me. I really felt the force given to me by the guru, this seems to me is one of the great mysteries of the guru-disciple relationship: he sees through you and also empowers you.

By being an English teacher, which was my destiny but not my real one, I became a yoga teacher, which was my real destiny. It was true that through an experience, the pieces of the puzzle started to become a real image. Being a westerner, I was not born with the idea that you climb up, progress from life to life to learn. Now I think that maybe, when the time comes, you are lucky enough to meet a guru whom you may have met in a previous life who has prepared you for something, and maybe that happened to me.



FERNANDO SANZ

Colombia

Fernando Sanz Manrique (Sn. Jnanideva) was born in 1936 in Bogotá, Colombia. He met Swami Satyananda Saraswati in Paris in 1969 and received mantra diksha from him. He was instrumental in inviting Swami Satyananda to Colombia and set up an organization for spreading the teachings of yoga which eventually became the Satyananda Yoga Academy of Bogotó. Accompanying Sri Swamiji to many international programs, he also supported the mission at many levels over several decades. Currently, he has retired from active professional life and lives in Guadalupe de Buga in Colombia where he teaches yoga to abandoned girls and the elderly.

When did you first either hear about or meet Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati. What was the experience like?

I met Sri Swami Satyananda as a result of a wide search process, both in time and space. Colombia was very far away from the possibility of meeting a spiritual master. The search lasted no less than twenty-five years and implied false encounters and a permanent attitude of scepticism and mistrust towards so-called 'masters'. The last chapter in France lasted for six months. When I met Sri Swami Satyananda in Paris, I immediately knew he was my guru.

The first time I heard about Swami Satyananda was through a French news program in the 60s. In those days, before a film show, a news program was projected in the theatres. Swamiji appeared on the screen doing trataka



with a candle in an apartment in Paris, probably the residence of Swami Devatmananda, a French disciple. By coincidence, Ignacio Copete had seen the same news program; we found out about it many years later.

What was the nature of your relationship with him subsequently – as a student, as a yoga teacher, as a spiritual seeker or as someone who worked for the mission of yoga?

With a group of friends interested in the subject we invited Swami Satyananda to Bogotá, and he accepted. Ten minutes after meeting him in Paris, he accepted me as his disciple and I still am. Our relationship is a guru-disciple relationship. Our first meeting was at Swami Devatmananda's place. After the first greetings, we stood there without uttering a word for twenty minutes and after that he wrote a sentence on a piece of paper that became my personal mantra. I asked him, "So, you are my guru now?" He simply replied, "Yes." He did not like to lose time. Later, I concluded that I had received my first lesson in meditation.

How would you describe Sri Swamiji's relationship with nature?

Amazing yet discreet. He was a very close friend of water: We organized his first conference in Colombia at a holiday resort in a town called El Ocaso, close to Bogotá. It was a Saturday and there were around forty people. As he began the lecture inside an open hall covered with a tin roof, a torrential rain poured down and it made a tremendous noise when it hit the roof. "Swamiji, we cannot hear!" Somebody shouted above the noise. "Let's stop for a while, and let's sing," he said and began chanting a kirtan. Two minutes later, the rain stopped.

It was very interesting when we noticed that the rain had stopped above the hall, but all around it still rained until the conference was over.

What was your experience of Swami Satyananda and his sense of compassion?

Swamiji was always well informed and up to date regarding international problems, local wars, and disasters caused by man. His willingness to help those in need who came to the ashram doors was proverbial. He used to channel and distribute aid to those in need in the state of Bihar, one of the poorest states in India. Above all, he had a special regard for women and would give them a dowry so that they could marry and hence avoid a desperate and horribly miserable future.

His compassion included nature, animals and even insects. I remember one time, when he was giving a lecture and I was sitting very close, I saw that a nasty mosquito landed on his left cheek. Evidently he noticed but he did not budge or make a gesture that could send it away, as anyone of us would have done. I think that he believed that he should let the mosquito be. The mosquito bit him and a bright red drop of blood rolled down his cheek, but he did not bother to clean it up. The mosquito needed to eat and he accepted to be its food.

How did the mission of Satyananda Yoga in Colombia begin?

The effort for the mission of Swami Satyananda in Colombia began with his first visit. As a consequence of that visit, the group of friends interested in yoga decided to create a non-profit entity that was the predecessor of today's Academia de Yoga. I was a member of the board and served as its president during many years. We were entrusted with beginning the propagation of yoga as a science and as a discipline; the travel and reception of swamis and yoga teachers from BSY; setting up classes; visits to other countries

in Latin America and the organization and promotion of events and international conferences in Bogotá.

The active and contributing members of the group were, among others: Ignacio Copete Saldarriaga and Maria Teresa Copete, the late Alvaro Copete Lizarralde, the late Rodrigo Niño and Gloria Nieto de Niño, Mario Gamboa and Cecilia de Gamboa, the late Roberto Martínez and Olga de Martínez.

Is there a special experience that stands out among the several you must have had with Sri Swamiji?

I will recall an experience that I had towards the end of the 70s. He invited us, my wife Gloria, Ignacio Copete and Maria Teresa Copete, to attend a lecture he was delivering in Paris. The venue was the auditorium of the neurology department of the Medicine Faculty of the University of Paris. He was introduced by professor Cloarec, dean or director of the neurology department at the University of Paris who was a friend of Swamiji. The auditorium was filled with thirty-five doctors from the hospital and the four young Colombians who had travelled to Paris to be with him for a few days.

The title of the lecture was astonishing: 'Techniques to stop the heart without dying in the process'. All the doctors wore a white robe and had the stethoscope hanging from their neck. Swamiji wore his usual dhoti and his sandals that in the west we call Franciscan monk sandals. The professor introduced him with many compliments and Swami Satyananda spoke for one and a half hours on the subject. As I remember, the techniques he spoke about were respiratory and others for ulterior utilization, visualizations, in particular of a mental light, intended for maintaining the vital connection and not lose it. The possibilities of the techniques were of almost indefinite duration.

Obviously, the doctors' faces denoted incredulity until one of them raised the hand to ask a question, "Professor Cloarec, you are one of the most respected medical eminences in Europe. Honestly, do you believe in what this man is telling us?" The professor replied that he was alive

and speaking to us thanks to the techniques that had allowed him to survive when he was lost in the African jungles, and that two years ago they had successfully conducted an experiment with another yogi in the hospital.

What were your feelings when you heard in 1988 that he had left Ganga Darshan.

Deep respect, I thought he must have had his reasons.

What was the nature of your connection with him during the Rikhia period?

It was a long-distance relationship. My professional engagements and other kinds of problems limited the marvellous closeness of the previous period.

How did you feel when you heard about mahasamadhi in 2009?

We received many reports about mahasamadhi, but not through the normal channels.

What is the nature of your connection with him today? Do you feel his presence in your day-to-day life?

I feel his spiritual presence and sometimes even his physical presence.



RISHI NITYABODHANANDA

Australia

Rishi Nityabodhananda was born in 1941 in Sydney, Australia. He came to BSY and met Sri Swamiji in 1969. Initiated into poorna sannyasa in 1970, he spent the next three years in the Sannyasa Training course and went on to stay at the Dhanbad ashram for eight years. Returning to Munger in 1980, he lived at Ganga Darshan until the mid-80s and assisted in construction work at the time. He went back to Australia to look after a new centre in Sydney. In 1999, he received rishi sannyasa from Swami Niranjanananda. He has authored four books on ajna, swadhisthana, manipura and anahata chakras. Currently, he lives in Australia and continues writing on and teaching yoga.

In 1973 we had the Swami Satyananda Golden Jubilee Convention, which was held from 9 to 16 October. About midway through the program down came the rain and the whole pandal went down with it. It was in front of the Dharmashala. There were thousands of guests who were all accommodated in schools and colleges in Munger. Sri Swamiji was absolutely undisturbed. I thought, 'Look at the mess, that beautiful pandal, floor coverings and carpets.' Everything was just a mess but he was not at all worried. Truckloads of puvaal, straw, came in, fresh carpets arrived and by lunchtime we were up and running as before. It was just a slight interruption, which Sri Swamiji called a 'refreshing blessing'.

When I came to Munger in 1969, I thought that I was coming to a meditation teacher. I did not know what a guru was. A lady in a bookshop in Sydney had told me that in India they have these people called gurus who removed the obstacles in meditation so that you could see the light. I thought, "That's just what I want". Once in India, I looked at the list I had and there was the Bihar School of Yoga. My meditation teacher in Sydney had said "He is a very powerful teacher, you should go and see him."

When I came to the ashram in Munger, it was 31st of October, the day before the kriya yoga course which started on 1st November. First of all, I found a bed and then I wandered out. There were two rooms, 'Ajna' and 'Bindu' and there was a man sitting outside with a row of chairs in front of him and some people with whom he was talking. I sat down and listened to what he was saying. I had always been a reluctant Jew. This is a person who has grown up in a discriminated Jewish area, where people always say, "Oh, Jew!" A friend of the family said, "You better not tell anyone you are Jewish."

I didn't know who Swami Satyananda was, there was just a man talking, and he said, "Jews make great scientists." My ears pricked up, I sat up a little straighter and then he said, "They make great musicians. And they are very good writers. And the best swamis." Then he added, "But they are a little tight with money." Later on I found that this was going to be the meditation teacher or the guru and that was my introduction to Sri Swami Satyananda.

He had had no introduction to me other than a small postcard I had sent. He did not know if I was from Australia or America, just that I knew English because it was written on the postcard. Yet, he seemed to know my whole culture and my psychological situation of being a reluctant Jew. It was his insight that gave him the clue on how to initiate our relationship.

The kriya yoga course was my introduction to yoga, no pawanmuktasana, straight kriya yoga. I began at the back

of the class because I was the last person there. Within two days someone came up to me and said, "You have to go and sit in the front." I said, "Oh no, not me, I can't sit." They said, "When Swamiji says you sit in the front, you sit in the front." So I went and sat in the front and for one month I was looking up at him from about 2 feet away.

It was a case of union, unification between that man and his process of teaching. Sri Swamiji had such a wonderful way of teaching, and from 4 am until 9 pm, every bit of the class was his. We did the first kriya, it took the whole day and we were held in suspense. It took us the whole day to go from mooladhara up to ajna and to bindu and back down again to mooladhara. As we went past every chakra, it was like a new vista, as if you are going on a journey. Each one was exciting and by the time we got back to swadhisthana, I thought, 'Ah, we are going back to the starting point'. That was at nine o'clock at night.

He gave such concentrated and beautiful classes. Each word was poised, it had meaning and just held our attention, we were focused on the practice so intensely, it was unforgettable. I took kriya yoga to heart and I decided, "This is my practice. I will get to that light on the other side of the ordinary experience".

Then I got my first karma yoga. In the morning before breakfast, I had to clean four toilets. I thought, "That's all right, I will clean four toilets, no problem. I will do my kriya yoga first, which takes about two and a half hours, then I will do the four toilets and go to breakfast at 6 o'clock". As soon as I got established in that routine, there was another row of toilets upstairs so eight toilets, 'Oh well, I'll just get up a bit earlier'. Then as soon as I got used to that, there were another four toilets and all the washbasins and the showers. It just got more and more and more karma yoga. Finally I was getting up at twelve o'clock. I knew Sri Swamiji was piling on the work and I was trying to pile on the kriya yoga, like a kind of battle. Well, he won and I thought, 'I will do kriya yoga sometime later'.

It was a fascinating life. Every evening he would give satsang. One night he might talk about neti, just to practise neti, but he had such a magnificent way of talking about neti that I remember I could see all different facets of that experience. He was talking about all other things including the neti. I cannot understand to this day how he managed to talk so much about neti.

Over the months, I became more and more engaged with this man. I had no introduction to the concept of a guru, I had never related with any person like this before. I thought you learn things from teachers and then you leave. Now suddenly here is this person. Sometimes he would smile at me and I would think, 'Why is he smiling?' It took a while but finally I crumbled and I fell for him. I must say, I did fall for him.

Some people were telling me about a sannyasa course. I thought, 'Do I want to do a sannyasa course?' They said that it was about renunciation and you didn't have to worry about worldly affairs. I went to Sri Swamiji and said, "Swamiji, I am interested in your sannyasa course." He said, "It is a serious business, if you do take to sannyasa. It is a decision and I do not consider weak decisions. I do not like weak decisions, I like strong decisions. If you think you are ready for sannyasa, then you should go out and see other gurus. Some will talk about God, some will talk about yoga and some will talk about mantra and some will talk about pooja. Go out and see them. Listen and after your tour, if you are ready to come back, then you can come back."

In January or so, he sent me out and he gave me a list of addresses of some ashrams to visit which had held Swami Satyananda in low esteem. I visited a few of those places and they said that they would give me a nice garden house if I stayed; or in another place they would send me down a deep well in meditation. Then I went to Benares a place full of gurus, but nobody appealed to me.

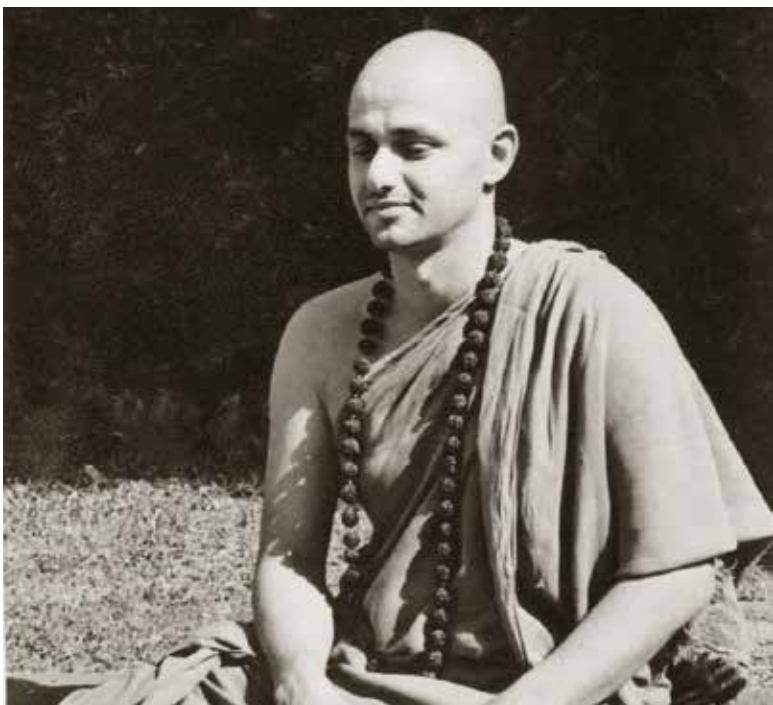
Finally I came back. He said, "Are you ready?" I said, "Yes, I am ready, Swamiji." He said, "The barber is there

and the ceremony is tonight.” On Basant Panchami in 1970, I took sannyasa.

After a few month of preparation, the sannyasa course started. The preparation was very interesting. We used to have a cook in the old BSY and he was in charge of us. For the early morning sadhana, we had to sit in a tiny room called Panchavati from 4 o'clock to 6 o'clock before breakfast. We had to sit completely still for two hours. The cook would sit in the middle with a name list, monitoring us. We would be sitting very steady. Then we would have breakfast. At lunch time, we would all sit down and we were served. So someone got a roti, another swami would get a roti, and I would miss out, “Where is my roti?” He would put his finger on his mouth because we were in mouna. He said, “You moved.” The next day I did not move. It was the best lesson in discipline, no movement whatsoever. Sri Swamiji loved such lessons.

Sri Swamiji loved that sannyasa course because he started off with new principles. He said, “These new principles are wonderful. Sannyasa life is communal.” He got one truckload of exercise books and a lot of pencils, we were given an exercise book and a pencil each. That was our personal property. Everything else had to go. No personal dhotis, no personal shirts. I remember to this day, one man had brought three years supply of razorblades from Australia, someone else brought some tins of sweetened condensed milk, all kinds of odd secret stashes. All had to go.

We wore one dhoti and it was hot weather. There were no personal clothes, everything was common. So when we went for a bath, we would just go to the line, take a dry cloth and go to the bathroom, wash the old cloth out, put the new cloth on and hang up the other. After the dhotis, Sri Swamiji decided ‘Too much cloth’. We used to treasure our upper dhoti, especially, if it had *Hari Om* written on the end or had a little bit of a gold thread in it. One day he tore them up into strips for the male swamis and we had to wear kaupin, a thin piece of loin cloth.



When we started off, we had beautiful china plates, cups and saucers. They were so elegant and here we were on the stone floor with china things using them very carefully. We did not want to break anything. That lasted for a whole month, for the next month we had steel thalis. Then the next month they all went away and we got a bucket, and the buckets stayed. We would eat out of the buckets. Then after lunch we would wash the buckets and we put the notebook and pencil in the bucket. So we had a bucket, a notebook and a pencil. We drank out of the bucket, for washing, for toilet, for eating we used just that one bucket. Using a bucket is fine, if you get rice and dal. If you get roti, you can hold the roti in your hand. Sometimes someone would come to the ashram and give you nice sweets, and you were stuck with this bucket. In went the rice first, in went the dal, then you carefully balance the sweet on top.

Sri Swamiji told us the story of Tatpatra. Tatpatra was a man who also had a tradition of bucket but he got sick of it. He just held out his hands and said, "Put in there what you can and I will eat it, whatever does not fit will not be eaten." We tried to ignore our impulses for sweets, and these were some of the new things we dealt with. Things were tough and things were interesting.

Sri Swamiji loved to give us two things to eat. He used to indulge us with sweets now and again, but he liked khichari and dalia. In those days, dalia, boiled broken wheat, was cheaper than the khichari. There was not that much money in those days, so that was a consideration. Even sugar was rationed. We often had dalia for extended periods, dalia for breakfast with a little sugar and a bit of lemon, maybe ginger. Then lunchtime would come and we would have dalia again, and if we were lucky, we would get a small bit of potato or cabbage in it.

The sleeping arrangements were pretty tight. There were 108 swamis to start with and not much space. There were only two rooms but we had the printing press. We were sleeping under the steps, or on the table, or under the table or anywhere.

We had very difficult lives. Sri Swamiji said, "My job is easy. I have the easiest job in the ashram. Whatever you want, I don't give. And whatever you don't want, I'll give. This is how you get expansion of mind." Every time we had a complaint, he would justify his actions with a spiritual basis, so what argument did we have?

I used to think I was pretty posh and educated so he would put illiterate girls in charge of me. It happened again and again. They would explain to me and insist that I clean the gate this way and not that way. Then Sri Swamiji would double it, he would take me aside and say, "Don't listen to her, she doesn't know anything." But he made her in-charge of me. The result was that I could make friends with stupid, illiterate people. It was good training. Everybody is the same and we can like all people. It really was an expansion of consciousness.

In the beginning of the sannyasa course, Sri Swamiji taught us mantra. Not many mantras, just one mantra, *Om*. I had renounced because I was a proud sannyasin. I had thrown all my malas and everything into the fire along with all my personal things. When we started the mantra sadhana, I did not have a mala. One day he was walking around with an armful of malas and suddenly he came to me, picked a mala out of a hundred on his arm and gave it to me with a knowing look – it was the same mala that I had thrown into the fire. From early morning right into the night, *Om, Om, Om*. We were doing 40 malas, 45 malas an hour.

After the mantra sadhana, we started on Upanishad chanting and vedic mantras. He would chant and we would repeat. Then he would say, “No, it is like this *Om shamno mitrasham varunaha*, not like this *Om shamno mitra sham varunaha*. Do you understand?” Then he would say, “I’ll do it again.” I would listen so carefully but I had an untrained ear and he was the expert in Sanskrit pronunciation so it took us one whole month to do one mantra. He was such a wonderful teacher. We were so disciplined and we sat like statues and we tried so hard. He would inspire us so much to be able to do that.

The next month was pranayama and Sri Swamiji started with nadi shodhana pranayama. For a whole month he was teaching us something we already knew, but he taught in such a way, how you followed the breath up, how you hold it, before exhaling you inhale a little and then you exhale, you could feel the hairs inside the nose move with the breath. For about one week we did stage 1, then we went to stage 2, then stage 3, until we were doing antar and bahiranga kumbhaka with the mudras. He said to me, “You will do 12:48:48:48.” I only just about managed. For one week or so, I was managing 12:48:48:48, I have never been able to do it since. With him sitting there and me sitting in front of him, it just happened. His influence was so powerful.

It was all right for us to do karma yoga but he did the karma yoga, too. Sri Swamiji was an expert in karma yoga. Well, we would break for morning tea. He would be over in

the office before we got our drink. He was typing and you would hear the typewriter going. He was a magnificent typist. Sri Swamiji's fingers would go up and down like a dance and pages would roll off, he never made a single mistake. His correspondence was finished and he would be in the queue as well for the morning tea or breakfast. Then he would sit down with us and over breakfast we had satsang. He used to say, "There is no difference between you and me, I just have a little bit more willpower." He had plenty of willpower.

Sri Swamiji's work ethic was quite wonderful. He used to be a dancer and though he never danced for us, when he worked, I used to watch him. He used to do crow walking and sweeping. It was a dance to watch how he worked, so systematic and beautiful and graceful, each movement with full awareness. When he finished with that, he would do all the toilets. We had to do everything else. Then he would change and do something else and we would be scrubbing pots, it was communal life in every way.

Sri Swamiji would sometimes sing. He was melodious, he had wonderful control of his voice and he knew all the ragas. Sri Swamiji had a wonderful singing voice and he always loved singing. He was a beautiful singer, magnificent singer. He would dance and sing and he would clap to the music, but he would never get involved totally. Sometimes we would have akhanda kirtan, which we all loved, but Sri Swamiji would never be fully involved.

I never thought too much about it until one day, we were all going to a wedding, all of us piled into the back of trucks. There were two truckloads of us, about twenty, thirty people in each truck. And Sri Swamiji let go! He was singing like anything, and he was singing and singing, and suddenly he was off into bhava samadhi. He was just in bliss. After some time, he came out again rather slowly and said, "This is why I don't sing too much." He had to be on duty but he had no trouble escaping this worldly consciousness. Like one of these pandals that have to be tied down in the wind, he had to tie himself down in order to keep on the ground and stay with us.

He had to stay on the job of being our caretaker, of being our educator, of being our trainer. In that way, he could make sure that his duty was done. He was always attentive. Each word meant something. If he dropped a word or two, it meant something. His words weren't just casual. Every time, every word, every action, every step was for a particular purpose. He was like that.

Sri Swamiji never slept, yet he slept all day. You would go past his room twenty-five times a day, you could hear loud snoring inside. It was always like that, yet he never slept. One night, I remember I came, it was 2 o'clock or so, and I banged on the gate. There was no gateman and before I had a chance to bang a second time, I heard his voice from inside, "*Kaun hai?*" "Who is it?" He was so completely alert and awake, yet the body slept. If you went to the toilet in the middle of the night and forgot to turn off the light, he would remind you in the morning. The body slept but he was always conscious. He explained, "Sleep is nothing, it is just a vritti. You can dispose of it. Yogis don't need sleep."

In the fourth or fifth month of the sannyasa course, we embarked on a course of chanting the four books of Vedas, for one month. After dinner, we sat down and we continued chanting the big volumes. We had a copy each and we would go on and on until four o'clock in the morning. The whole month we continued like that. I remember Swami Gorakhnath got a cold. I became very thin. During the day there was no sleep. During the night there was only chanting. It just went on and on. That was a wonderful experiment, a challenge to overcome sleep. Sri Swamiji was so encouraging. At midnight he used to give us a cup of black tea and how we looked forward to it! Apart from that we just kept going. One day during my karma yoga, after lunch, I become very sleepy. Sri Swamiji called me and said, "Sit there. Chant *Gita*." He gave me a book and I started. It went on for about one hour or two. Then he called me and said, "That's enough." I was wide awake. The mantras replaced the sleep. It was such a good experience and I know now that sleep is just a vritti. He taught us that.

After a year or so into the course, we started going out for tours with Sri Swamiji. There would be a gathering somewhere. Sri Swamiji was up the front making a great speech that yoga would be the culture of tomorrow. Wonderful speeches he used to make and people loved them. During the program, somebody would come around and tap you on the shoulder, "Swamiji is calling you." So you would quietly go and walk behind him in the middle of the speech. He would turn around and say, "You are going to speak on pranayama next." My heart would sink. What do I know about pranayama? You breathe in and out. He would finish his speech and give a great introduction, "And now, it is my best disciple, Swami Nityabodhananda, he is going to speak on pranayama." Suddenly you have to come up with something on pranayama.

For the first one, I could not say a word and after two or three minutes of silence, Sri Swamiji gave some nice cover-up statement. The next day in the street, somebody came and touched my feet and said, "It was so great that in front of your Guru you could not speak." When I told Sri Swamiji about this, he said, "Yes, such devotees have great understanding."

Sri Swamiji used to say, "My swamis have to be like a bomb, always ready to go off," so that we could be placed into any situation and just start talking about yoga. That was his training. His whole life and his whole style of work was to be able to train people to be able to work in any situation with any type of people.

For a long while I was teaching coal miners in Dhanbad. I used to invite Sri Swamiji and he would come and give a program at the end of my seminars. He said, "You don't even have to tell me about it, just ring me up and say you have arranged the program here and I will be there." This went on for quite some time. I enjoyed it so much because at the end of any ten-day program, I would ring up Sri Swamiji and say that we had a program in a particular place and down he would come. They were very popular and a wonderful relationship was established with Sri Swamiji in all the coalfield areas.

I came back to Munger after eight years in Dhanbad. We had to go and get marble from Jaipur, steel from Kolkata, cement from Patna. Buy it, pay for it, put it on the truck, bring it here and deliver it. That was how I spent my last years, bringing all the stuff for the construction of the new Ganga Darshan ashram. I was not the only one, there were plenty of people doing it. All the timber for all the window frames, beds and door frames, we brought from Siliguri.

Ganga Darshan was a construction site for years and years. There was a giant concrete mixer and hundreds of workers carrying those kadhais and tipping cement over. There was so much activity, a lot of banging, clanging, yelling and shouting. Swamiji used to live in Kutir. He was never disturbed by the noise, he was never distracted and never complained. He was never disturbed in the least bit by any quantity of construction noise. He just accepted it.

My relationship with Sri Swamiji has always been that of a servant, 'Do this, do that, do this'. It was always work-related and it was delightful. Sri Swamiji used to say, "A swami should be able to learn to stand on his own two feet, in the world, and not hang onto the feet of the guru in the world, but keep the guru in the heart." I can hardly have my physical relationship with Sri Swami Satyananda now but he is with me. He is with me in Swami Niranjan in Munger. He is with me everywhere and for me there is only one Sri Swamiji, and he is in the heart.



SWAMI PRAGYAMURTI SARASWATI

UK

Swami Pragyamurti met Sri Swami Satyananda in the late 60s and was inspired by him to start teaching yoga. She received initiation into poorna sannyasa by Sri Swamiji in 1976. Swami Pragyamurti is the founder and yogacharya of Satyananda Yoga Centre, London, where she continues to teach and hold seminars on yoga. She has also worked in South Africa, taking yoga to prisons, townships and introducing teachers from other traditions to Satyananda Yoga. Over the past forty-seven years, she has made valuable contributions towards developing and teaching teacher training courses, working with people with HIV/AIDS and introducing yoga into prisons in UK and South Africa.

I met Sri Swamiji's yoga in the early 60s through Lily Kowalska who had just come back from India and was offering yoga classes. She taught asana, pranayama and yoga nidra and I fell in love with the teachings. I finally met Swami Satyananda only in the late 60s. When I heard that he was coming to France, I went to meet him with some friends from Lily Kowalska's yoga classes.

We had a seminar in a château with a gorgeous parkland off the north coast of France. In the very first class, I was shown to a seat in the front row. Little did I know what was going to happen! In those days Sri Swamiji was teaching all the classes himself, asana, pranayama, everything. When he came into the room, I looked into his eyes and ended up

crying throughout the entire asana class. One of the swamis noticed my tears and she ushered me out, helped me wash my face and blow my nose. Then she said, “Get back in there!” So I went back in and Sri Swamiji said, “Come and see me later.” I had an appointment with him and he told me that I was destined to become his disciple, that he had had a dream years ago of people he must touch and who would become his disciples. I was amongst the people that he had seen in his dreams or visions, so he knew I must become one of his disciples. I was stunned.

I came back to London after the yoga weekend in France and my life has never been the same since. He is my guru and I am his disciple and devotee and he told me then that I must start teaching yoga. I was a model agent at the time and I had some of the best looking guys in London on my books. I wore three pairs of false eyelashes, had long blonde hair and was a very stylish woman in those days. As it happened, he got me sacked from my own agency and had me move into the house in which I still live in Balham. All of a sudden, students started to turn up at my door, telling me that they had come for my yoga classes. He guided me in the yoga classes because I had never done a teacher training class in my life. Until that point, I had been practising yoga for my own personal satisfaction. So that was the way things started at 70, Thurleigh Road. Sri Swamiji has come here





several times, he has been in every room in the house and he has blessed it and life is still continuing with classes.

In the late 70s, there was a yoga convention in Dublin and I was invited to attend the classes. I realized that Sri Swamiji was giving mantra initiation and spiritual name, I thought 'I'm up for that'. I went to book a place and all these swamis, including people I had much affection and much respect for, were sitting in a row and I sat on my chair opposite them. They

started talking in Hindi and they also started laughing, laughing. When they stopped laughing and talking in Hindi, they asked me, "What do you want?" I replied, "I want a mantra so you can put me on the list for mantra initiation." The next day, I was on the list for mantra and Sri Swamiji greeted me and he said, "You must be initiated tomorrow. Somebody is going to come round and shave your head." I said, "What? Shave my head?" So my gorgeous thick long blonde hair had to be cut off.

I remember it well. Various forms of razors were found and I was sitting in my room shaving my head until it was completely bald. Nobody told me what was happening next. I went to sleep, more or less. I was called in the early morning and told to go to Sri Swamiji's room. There were a couple of other people in the room and he said, "Come in! I am going to initiate you into full sannyasa." I was gobsmacked, it was the shock of my life. He initiated me and he told me what my name, *Pragyamurti*, meant. He said that *pragya* means intuitive wisdom and *murti* is the symbol of embodiment. After I touched his feet, he told me that the

various inmates of the conference were having breakfast and I was to go and touch the feet of everybody who was initiated and tell them what my new name was. I went down to the dining room and I had to touch the feet of everyone who was there. I knelt down, touched their feet and said, "Hari Om, my name is Swami Pragyamurti." Then I called my children in London and told them that I had been initiated and my head had been shaved. I told my daughters that they could have all my non-orange clothes. They simply said, "Okay, mum. We'll see you when you get back!"

I went to the ashram in India in 1985 for six months, which was the longest time one could get a visitor's visa in those days. I stayed in the ashram and when I was there, I was staying in a building to myself. I woke up one day completely unable to see. It was a shock! Somehow I found my way up to Sri Swamiji's kutir and I said, "Swamiji, I can't see. I am completely blind." He had somebody escort me back to my room and he suggested that I do various methods of sadhana. Eventually I was able to see a little bit and life carried on. "Get your eyes tested," was the only thing he said to me when I was heading back to London, which was good advice.

One time when I went to visit India, Sri Swamiji had left the ashram and Swami Niranjan was in Munger then. Sri Swamiji was travelling around India and he settled in a little place called Rikhia. One morning Swami Niranjan told all of the sannyasins to get on the bus early. Slowly, as the bus went on and people started to recognize the landscape, the conclusion was that we were going to see Swami Satyananda. Indeed we were! We went to the ashram and we saw Sri Swamiji sitting outside a little tent. He talked to us about how he had found his place and space and what he wanted there. He asked us to unload a lorry full of bricks, which we did. Year by year we were invited to go to celebrations there, or when he was in isolation we couldn't visit Rikhia in spite of the fact that we were in India.

As he got older he became more and more powerful and in the end, he chose to leave his body. One morning Swami

Niranjan called and told me personally that he had been in a state of meditation and that he had left his body consciously. I was shocked. I remember asking, “Shall I come over to India for the funeral or the end-of-lifetime ceremonies that are held for gurus?” He said, “No. Don’t come. Don’t come to India just yet. Look after the other disciples and students.” I have been back to Rikhia to see the shrine and his presence is still there.

His presence is still in my house and I shall nurture it and treasure it for the next few years, as long as I live. I am so grateful for this lifetime and to have been so inspired by Sri Swamiji, for being allowed to teach his glorious teachings. I am just grateful. I will move on to the next life with a vision and a sense of his presence during my life. Sri Swamiji has guided me and inspired me all along. I have had no training apart from his training and I have been teaching classes, seminars and courses over the years and I still am. And so be it, for until he tells me to stop teaching – because I am so old and so forgetful – I will continue teaching these precious practices. Hari Om Tat Sat and bless you Swamiji for being my guru.



SWAMI GORAKHNATH SARASWATI

India

Born in Chhattisgarh, India in 1951, Swami Gorakhnath first met Sri Swami Satyananda at Raigarh in 1968. His next meeting with Sri Swamiji was in 1970, after which he came to Munger and was initiated into poorna sannyasa. Participating in the three-year Sannyasa Training, he continued to live in the ashram until 1975 when he went to Australia and taught yoga for one year. For the next fifteen years, he taught in Munger and at various centres and ashrams in India. From 1990 to 1992, he was sent to Rishikesh for further studies and on his return offered his seva at the Shanti Darshan Yoga Ashram in Bokaro where he currently resides as acharya. Swami Gorakhnath also guides yoga shivirs and camps across the country and visits both Munger and Rikhia ashrams regularly.

I came to Munger, to our old ashram in 1970 and my training began right from that time. Soon after I had reached, Sri Swamiji said that he was going to be travelling for about two or three months. He told all of us to stay together and work with each other. At that time, he gave me the name Swami Gorakhnath Saraswati. I did not even know the real meaning of the name. All the sannyasins used to tease me about it because there was no 'ananda' at the end of my name. They would say that Swamiji would ask me to leave the ashram at any time.

'Satyananda', 'Niranjanananda', 'Premananda', 'Krishnananda', everyone is 'ananda'. But my name had no 'ananda'

and after a while I started thinking that they were right. So the day he returned, I ran to him and said, “Swamiji, please change my name.” When he asked me the reason, I told him that I didn’t have ‘ananda’ at the end of my name, everyone was saying that Swamiji could ask me to leave at any time. He said, “All right, add it – Gorakhnathananda.” That sounded even more strange! Then one day he said to me, “Silly fellow! I gave you such a nice name and you asked me to change it.” Then he explained the real meaning of the name he had given me, he translated it clearly and distinctly and that settled the matter. I really liked my name from that time!

I can truly say that nowhere in the world or in any other institution or ashram of any other sannyasin would one receive the training that Sri Swamiji gave us. He trained us in every sphere, for every stage of our development in life. I used to travel around quite a lot, met many mahamandaleshwars but no one came anywhere close to our Swamiji. All they would do was entice you and say if you stayed with them for six months, they would give you the position and pomp that they had, they would hand over the ashram to you and you could run it. I would say that ‘I am associated with such an institution and such a guru and you are trying to tempt me with all this?’ No one was able

to impress me more than Sri Swamiji.



Wherever I would go and whatever I would hear, I used to remember Sri Swamiji. Those people only spoke a lot of stuff but the training that Sri Swamiji gave us was practical. All the others spoke about the usual topics – *kama*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *irshya*, *dvesha*, *ahamkara*, *ghamand* – but the feeling I used to get was that it was their *aham-*

kara, their pride which was speaking. Give a mike to them and they can talk all night long about *ahamkara*, about ego, but none of them had any control over themselves.

We did not know about all these words but when Sri Swamiji used to speak and train us, we did not know what *karma yoga* was or what is *guru* or how should one interact with the *guru*. None of that. We simply used to follow his instructions and obey whatever he told us to do without thinking too much about it. It was like we had switched off our minds. Of course, at times when things seemed odd to us, we did grumble under our breath, 'Why is this *guru* making us do all this? He tells us to do this and that'. But even those situations were created by him to help us express our innermost feelings and not suppress them within ourselves. He knew all those tricks. Only after many years of being with him and receiving the training did we begin to understand about all these things like *ahamkara*, *ghamand*, *irshya*, *dvesha*. We had already experienced them and so finally we understood it all.

We used to be busy with *karma yoga* all day, morning to night, all day, non-stop. Where was the question about being plagued by *kamashakti* and *ichhashakti*, by wants and desires? Sri Swamiji used to keep us on our feet all the time, running about doing a hundred things. After *kirtan*, when we would finally go to bed, we would fall asleep immediately. He would wake us up by 3 or 3.30 and sometimes even by 2 or 1 o'clock in the morning and take classes with us. Where was there any time to get into any headtrips? And whatever little we did know about, it was all wiped clean.

Sometimes there used to be so much work, one would think that one should simply run away. I used to think



that a lot of times. But then Sri Swamiji had explained the meaning of my name to me and said that I should stay there and work with all these people. In those days there were 7 or 8 people who were in charge of different areas – office in-charge, garden in-charge, press in-charge, kitchen in-charge. When new students join a college, they get ragged by seniors. Well, that is what all these in-charges did to us. They would demand that we went to the office at this time, to the garden at another time, printing press and kitchen also. Big long lists used to be made and I used to think, ‘There is hardly any time to sleep, let alone have meals. I will just wither away and die here’. The food was not much to speak of either. Roasted broken wheat, not always properly cooked, often without salt – that was what we ate. Every night I would go to bed and say to myself that I would run away in the morning. But when I would wake up by 3.30 or so and start doing japā, I would ask myself, ‘What is the reason you have come here? To eat? To live a comfortable life?’ All the doubts and anger would vanish and I would get to work again. This is how it went on for a long time.

Sri Swamiji returned from his travels and classes started but not just any regular class. He woke us at 1 or 1.30 in the morning and we used to have asana class for four, five hours. Nobody had any wristwatches; they had all been taken away. We used to peer outside the window and wonder when dawn would come. Then he used to make us even more angry and say that he thought it was four o’clock but had woken us up at 1.30! In this manner, his training was what I recall and I realize how he tackled so much in these ways, little secrets were hidden within all these things to help us overcome our conditioning.

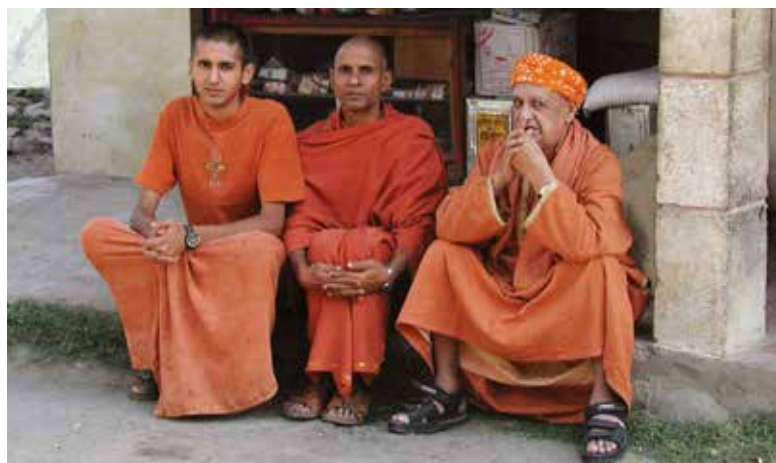
We had hardly any possessions. Two dhotis in the room, and a little bit of tooth powder that Sri Swamiji himself would make for us, nothing else. A bed, no mattress, just a blanket, if there was a sheet we spread it out and slept on it. Sometimes Sri Swamiji would come to inspect the room and check if we had stashed any stuff there, but we had nothing



so the room was neat and clean. Then he would say to us, "Very good, very neat and clean." We would be overjoyed that he had praised us.

He also trained us in how not to use our own head but to follow instructions and learn to be obedient. This was a great way to take care of our inflated egos. After one of his trips to Australia, he returned via Kolkata and came to the Dhanbad ashram where I was at the time. He went into every room and inspected every corner of the ashram. Before leaving, he said to me, "Look, please keep everything as it is now. There is no need to move things around from here to there." There were also two other swamis there at that time. He gave this instruction very clearly and then he left for Munger. A few days later, I called the other two sannyasis and said to them that the cupboard which was right next to the door in one of the rooms looked odd. We decided to shift it into a corner and make sure it was out of the way.

A day later, a telegram was received from Munger. It was addressed to me and sent by Sri Swamiji. In those days my English was not at all good so I asked the other two swamis, who were from England and Australia, to read the telegram. The message was short and succinct: 'Leave the



ashram immediately'. I used my own head and automatically assumed that I was being called to Munger by Sri Swamiji. The next day, another telegram came with the same message and on the third day, another similar telegram. The other two swamis then said to me that it looks like you are being told to leave the ashram for good. "What nonsense," I retorted, "You people can read English but you understand nothing. Why should I be told to leave the ashram? He is just calling me to Munger, that's all."

Well, three telegrams with the same message on three consecutive days is not an everyday occurrence so I packed a small bag and went to Munger. When I got to the gate of the ashram, a sannyasi informed Sri Swamiji that I had arrived. The message that came back from him was to ask for the reason for my visit. I said that I was called here by Sri Swamiji himself, he had sent three telegrams to me and gave them to the sannyasi so that he could show them to him. The sannyasi returned with another question, "Do you understand what it says in the telegram?" Of course I did! The telegram message meant that I should leave Dhanbad ashram and come to Munger and that is what I had done.

Then Sri Swamiji called me inside his room. After I sat down, he asked me whether I remembered what he had

told me fifteen days ago when he had come to Dhanbad from Kolkata. That was when I started thinking and initially nothing specific came up. Then I remembered and I said, “Yes, Gurudev.” “And what had I said?” he asked. “You had said that nothing should be moved around and that everything should be kept as it was.” As soon as I said that, it clicked in my mind what this was all about. Then he said to me if I could not read English, why did I not ask the other foreign swamis there to tell me what it meant. I went on about how it said that I should leave the ashram immediately and come to Munger. “Don’t use your head too much! Either you follow instructions or take off the geru clothes and get out of the ashram.”

This was a very great and important lesson for us because we all think that we are very smart and are arrogant about even little things. This was how he taught us to see how our pride comes in the way of simply obeying the guru and humbly following instructions.

I will always be grateful for the good fortune to have had such a guru. He guided me all through and continues to do so even today.



SWAMI SIVAMAYA SARASWATI

Colombia

Swami Sivamaya was born in 1941 in Colombia. She met Sri Swamiji in 1971 and became a loyal devotee, working tirelessly for Satyananda Yoga in Colombia and organizing all Sri Swamiji's subsequent visits to South and North America. Developing yoga programs for schools, universities and cultural institutions, she also travelled extensively with both Sri Swamiji and Swami Niranjanananda and helped organize the World Yoga Conventions in Colombia that were held in 1975, 1980, 1995 and 2005. She has been a member of the governing body of the Satyananda Yoga Academy of Bogotá since its inception and assisted in the development of Yogic Studies in Colombia. She was initiated in karma sannyasa by Sri Swamiji in 1986. Currently, she divides her time between Colombia and the United States of America and still coordinates the Teacher Training Course (TTC) while teaching in both the TTC and Yogic Studies in Bogotá.

I met Sri Swamiji in 1971. A friend of my husband had met him in Paris and when he came back to Bogotá, he shared with us his experience of meeting the most wise and important person he had ever met. So we decided to invite that sage to Colombia and he was Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati.

Since the moment Sri Swamiji arrived at the airport, my husband and I wanted to be near him and to hear everything he was saying and teaching. We went to all his lectures and also had lunch and dinner with him. I always remember his explanations about the mind, it was so inspiring: the

importance of understanding the mind and how to make friends with it. Through stories he was helping us understand all his teachings. While referring to the mind, I remember that story of the king who had four excellent but very wild and indomitable horses and how after being trained, they became the most wonderful horses. He showed us in a nice and simple way how to be a better person and to improve our qualities. The yoga techniques he taught us at that time, such as surya namaskara, yoga nidra and short meditations, captivated us.

One day we took him to one of the most ancient and beautiful churches in Bogotá. Mass was in progress, Sri Swamiji walked to the altar, stopped there and became very quiet. We were just looking at him. He was quiet, his eyes closed and he stood totally still, no movement. When the mass was over and Sri Swamiji came out, a lady came out from the church saying, “Oh, he’s a saint! He’s a saint! Let me touch his cloth.” She touched his dhoti and went away. I was thinking, ‘Really, that is why we want to stay with him the whole time’.

Before Sri Swamiji left, one of our friends asked him if he could send a teacher, so we could learn more and start practising yoga. Sri Swamiji said, “Yes I will send a teacher to Colombia if you have a place where he can live and teach.” Immediately after dropping off Sri Swamiji at the airport, we started looking for a place and to organize all the legal requirements for a visa for the person who would come to teach us. When we informed Sri Swamiji that everything was ready for the teacher, he sent us Swami Amritananda and later Swami Kaivalyananda. In 1973, Swami Niranjan also came and it was a marvellous experience. As soon as he arrived, he became a member



of the family and the children loved to play with him. Though he could be playful and naughty, he was responsible and he took his yoga classes seriously. While he was in Colombia, he did a lot of research work of the culture of our indigenous people.

In 1973, the Golden Jubilee to commemorate the 50 years of Sri Swamiji was organized in Munger, so we decided to organize a group from Colombia to come and participate in it. For us, India was very far and also a little mysterious country. Sri Swamiji guided us in all aspects, he indicated the best way to travel from New Delhi to Munger, which train we should take, how to find it and everything we would need. He took care of all the details for our trip and when we finally arrived in Munger, he was like the father who received his children, full of love and care.

We also participated in the kriya yoga course with Sri Swamiji. When it concluded, my husband and I went to him and said, "We don't have a guru nor a name." He smiled and told us, "I am your guru" and gave us our mantra and our spiritual names in a very beautiful way. He said, "We are three, I am Satyam, you are Sivam," he said to my husband and to me he said, "You are Sundaram." We were so proud and happy with our names. He also performed havan with the Colombian group and initiated all of us. We came back to Colombia very happy because we had a master who would illuminate our spiritual journey at every moment.

In 1975, we organized a World Yoga Convention in Bogotá which was presided over by Sri Swamiji and it was very successful. After it was over, we were talking with Sri Swamiji and my husband said, "We are so happy that everything has gone so well despite all the misunderstandings and discussions we had among us while preparing for the convention." Sri Swamiji looked at us, smiled and said, "From now you only have to think that you are a violin, I am the musician. The only thing you have to do is keep your instrument in perfect conditions so I can play the best music." That was so inspiring.

We also asked Sri Swamiji how to educate our children and raise them in the best way. He told us, “Let them grow free, don’t impose anything upon them. They have their own personality. The only thing you have to give them is love and set a good example. If you can give them love and a good example, you are doing the best.”

After the 1975 Convention, Sri Swamiji came to Colombia many times. We were always with him, travelling with him and receiving his teachings and advice. He visited different cities in Colombia and went to the Caribbean Islands, Santo Domingo, Aruba, Curacao, Martinique. I have special memories from every trip.

In one of his early visits, he started a lecture saying, “I don’t bring you anything new. I have come to remind you of your own culture and the knowledge of your ancestors.” He talked about the tantric culture which had developed around the world but was lost after wars and invasions, though it was preserved in India. On one of his last visits, we went with Sri Swamiji to San Agustín, an archaeological park that still is very well conserved and where we can find lots of sculptures, engravings and drawings of our indigenous people who had lived hundreds of years ago. While we were touring the park, Sri Swamiji was explaining the different postures of the sculptures and the symbology of the inscriptions and drawings made in stone. With the guidance of Sri Swamiji, we were discovering our own heritage and understanding how it was part of the tantric tradition.

Once in a satsang in Cali, a city in Colombia, one lady asked Sri Swamiji, “Can we develop powers?” Sri Swamiji replied, “Yes, there is a power that man can develop, the most powerful of all the powers; the power that can transform everything; the power that gives strength and the capacity to develop the best in every person and every place. That is the power of love.”

During another visit, we had a seminar on a farm and the lectures and classes were given in a big tent. We were in a satsang with Sri Swamiji and suddenly it started raining. Soon

the rain turned into a big storm. The noise of the wind and the thunder, the lightening and trees moving were too much, so Sri Swamiji ask for the harmonium and start singing, *Tero naama*. After some minutes the storm diminished, the wind did not blow so hard and the noise was much less so the satsang could resume. When it was over and we came out of the tent, what a surprise! The only place where there was no rain was in the area around the tent and ten metres beyond where we were, the storm had continued with the same force.

Another time when Sri Swamiji came we had bought a typewriter machine, we took him to the office to show it. Sri Swamiji wrote there: 'Lucky is the man who knows how to take advantage of opportunities life gives'. That sentence has helped me in many situations.

We also travelled to India to meet Sri Swamiji at the ashram many times. Of all the trips, we had the most beautiful time with him in 1986. He was with us all the time. We walked around Ganga Darshan which had just been newly constructed. He showed us everything and explained the organization, the distribution and the use of every building. But more specially, he was talking with us about various things in life. My husband was very ill and Sri Swamii was explaining to him what to do, which diet he should take, which job he should look for and how to work in a more relaxed way. Again, we felt in the home of the most loving father. My husband died a few days after we returned to Colombia and at that moment I realized that most of the things Sri Swamiji was talking about were to prepare him for a good death and for me to be strong and know how to face the difficulties I would have to deal with. We felt Sri Swamiji was guiding us step by step.

Years later, at a moment when I was very tired with the financial work I was doing, I remembered Sri Swamiji telling my husband that a diplomatic assignment could be a good job for him. My husband did not have the time to follow that advice but it gave me the idea to look for a diplomatic assignment in India. I started to look for the opportunity

to get it and I got it. I was nominated as the Colombian Ambassador to India. It was only because of Sri Swamiji's blessings as I did not have any diplomatic experience.

I travelled with two of my children and when we arrived in India to start my work, the first thing we did was to see Sri Swamiji in Rikhia and Swami Niranjan in Ganga Darshan. That was the best part of my tenure. Just meeting him I felt secure and confident because he had a way to make us see our best qualities and capabilities. All the fears I had simply vanished. I visited him every month while I was at the embassy. Just to be near him gave me special happiness, peace and security. Sometimes I would tell him about the different economic, political and social affairs that were happening in Delhi and he would tell me stories about India and the different changes since independence.

All those stories had a special message and an important teaching that helped me very much in the performance of my duties. At the same time, they also stimulated me to investigate more and know all about everything I had to develop at the embassy. One of his great teachings was to have a deep respect for all cultures and all the paths that lead to spirituality, whether it is a religion, a philosophy or a special practice. In one of the yajnas celebrated in Rikhia, Sri Swamiji invited priests and leaders from different religions. He participated in their rituals, gave them great respect and shared with them everything he had at the Akhara.

I loved to go to the yajnas, I enjoyed every minute of them. I received inspiration, love and great care. The best inspiration was his magnificent work of helping the community, educating the children and giving the women a place in society. To see him with the children with such tenderness, love and care awakened those qualities in us as well. We wanted to develop at least a little of them to be closer him. He was like a mother taking care of her children and teaching them how to grow strong, healthy and full of knowledge. He led us to meet the Divine Mother and to know how to invoke her, how to prepare ourselves to

connect with her. He gave us the most valuable thing we can have in life: the awareness of our spiritual potential and the inspiration to develop it.

Sri Swamiji's mahasamadhi was very hard for me. I had seen him just two days before it happened. He had given darshan and satsang at the end of the yajna. He looked so well when he spoke to us and specially to the people and the parents of the children of Rikhia. He told them that they should have always great respect for their families and children. After he finished, we passed by in front of him to offer our respect. He looked at me with a beautiful smile that gave me a lot of happiness. Immediately after the program finished, we went to Munger thinking that Sri Swamiji would be with us for several more years. But, one day after we arrived, very early in the morning a swami knocked at my door to inform me that Swamiji had taken mahasamadhi. I couldn't stop crying. We went to Rikhia and when we arrived there was a special energy, everything had a special light and I felt very secure. Sri Swamiji had to go but He will be in my heart forever.

Fortunately, now I am pensioned and I can dedicate my life to the work of yoga. That is what I am doing and that is what I am enjoying. Of course, I am still trying to keep the instrument in the best condition so Sri Swamiji can play the best music!



SMT KRISHNA DEVI

India

Srimati Krishna Deviji had her first darshan of Sri Swami Satyananda in 1973. She was a well-known kathakar and travelled all over India giving programs on the Ramacharitmanas and Srimad Bhagavat. Sri Swamiji also asked her to accompany him on his many seminars and yoga programs. He gave her the name 'Manas Kokila' in appreciation of her sweet, musical and melodious kathas. Her kathas were a regular feature during programs in Rikhhia. Krishna Devi continues to enthral audiences with inspiring anecdotes, events and teachings from the Ramacharitmanas whenever she visits the ashrams in Rikhhia and Munger.

Though we saw and knew Sri Swamiji, what can we say about him? It is a difficult task. Saying anything about him is akin to a doll of salt going to meet the ocean. I recall a poem written by him:

A little salt doll goes to bathe in the ocean
Taking along her excuses of intelligence and ideas.
Looking at this folly, I am astounded, I am speechless.
Who am I, who am I, who am I?
This question echoes endlessly in the void
And I ask this of me, myself,
Who am I, who am I,



Who, who,
Who am I?

I had my first darshan of Sri Swamiji about 40 years ago and he introduced me to myself. I found everything within him. I saw mother and father in him. He was my Guru, of course, but I also saw my beloved Bhagvan Sri Rama within him as well. When I think about him, not just one single thought comes to mind but I feel enveloped by myriad thoughts.

In 1974, I started accompanying him on yoga seminars and programs. My son, Manas, had just been born and that was also through his grace. I travelled with him on many tours and during that time, I not only learnt about bhakti and about conducting kathas, but I also learnt about household life. How one should lead one's life, how one can widen the doors of the heart, how to take away the meanness of mind – I learnt all this from him.

Once we had to go to Raipur. Sri Swamiji boarded the train at Jamalpur and I got on at Bhagalpur. My mother-in-law had very high regard for him and she was a very spiritual lady but my travelling out of the house on these trips became a source of great trouble for her. Sometimes she used to get very angry. I would get flustered at such times and find myself in a quandary as to what to do. She was right in how she felt but my problem was that I could not survive without doing kathas. I had never discussed my household problems with Sri Swamiji. When I greeted him after getting on the train that day, my eyes were brimming with tears and he asked me if I was in some kind of trouble. When I told him how my mother-in-law felt about my doing kathas and asked him if I should give it up, I think that anybody else in his

place would have answered, 'No, you should not give up' or 'Yes, you should give this up'.

He said something else altogether and turned my thinking around in a way that I would never have thought. He said, "You are not going to perform austerities in a jungle, it is in your home that you will be staying. And God has given you an opportunity to perform austerities there itself. If you are able to tolerate her anger and still love and serve her, then you will attain siddhis through this austerity while sitting at home. What is so unreasonable about her anger? When you go off travelling with sadhus and even take your little son along, won't your mother-in-law be angry about it?" He explained the situation to me so beautifully that I was not troubled by this worry anymore. I just kept on loving and serving my mother-in-law and gradually, with Guru's blessings, a time came when she began accompanying me on katha tours and would listen to them with a lot of interest. I learnt this invaluable lesson from Sri Swamiji.

When I think about it, what is it that I have not learnt from him? If I had to write it all down, it will turn into a magnum opus. When I had darshan of him during his panchagni tapasya, I felt that my heart would stop. We were returning after a katha in Hazaribagh and I had an intense yearning to see him. We managed to get to Rikhia after asking our way around. The sadhu who was sitting outside the gate said, "He does not meet anyone. How come you people turned up?" We begged him to please just inform Sri Swamiji that we had come and if he asked us to leave, that would be all right.

He came back after some time and took us to see Sri Swamiji. It had been seven years since I had seen him. When he saw me, he laughed and said, "I was thinking about you just this morning." I started to cry, saying, "Unless you think of someone, it is not possible for them to come anywhere near you. Of course, you must have thought of me, that's why I felt that I had to see you today itself." I cried a lot. His whole body looked as if it had been scorched black by the

fire. The beauty was amazing. There is a description of Sri Rama in Valmiki's *Ramayana: Sadaiva priyadarshan* – meaning whenever one sees Sri Rama, he is always beautiful. When I saw Sri Swamiji, that's what I thought: *Sadaiva priyadarshan* – eternally and always beautiful. No one can look eternally beautiful, but he did!

I had gone somewhere recently to do a Bhagvad katha. here was a very beautiful person, tall, handsome, fair and bright, but when he slept, his snoring rattled the entire building. His guru would tell him, *Aapan tej samharo aape* – “You destroy your glory all by yourself!” So, tell me, can anyone be beautiful all the time? Our Gurudev was certainly *sadaiva priyadarshan*.

I asked him why he needed to do this panchagni tapasya? Why was he doing all this? After all, we can only think according to our standards. He replied, “Oh, come on now! Shackles are shackles, whether they are of iron or gold. Should I ask your permission before I shrug them off?” My tears just would not stop falling. Then he said, “You can cry away all you like. My heart is like that of a monkey. I don't cry for anyone.” I had never experienced this monkey's heart that he was talking about. I had received such amazing love from him.

I remember one incident when Manas' wedding took place during the Sat Chandi Mahayajna. It was as if there was a veritable shower of compassion and grace, it was endless. What he gave us, truly is something only Gurudev can give us. Kabir says:

Try as you might, you can't cut it,
Try as you might, nothing can burn it,
It stays evergreen forever,
Numerous snakes die as soon as they sniff it,
This magical herb that the guru bestowed upon me!

Sri Swamiji has given us such a precious treasure that nothing can break it or burn it and the heart is always filled with joy. We used to be bothered by trivial things but when we beheld him, then:

The heart is untouched by the travails
of this sorrowful world
Because I have altered the way
I experience the world now.
When I look through your eyes, everyone is mine,
I find friends everywhere I go now,
I had taken on enmity with everyone for nothing!

It was a few years before we went to attend the Sat Chandi Yajna again. Sri Swamiji did not come out for the program so one did not really feel like going either. When we finally did go, we had darshan with him. He laughingly said, "So, you don't come anymore now?" I sat silently with folded hands. Then he asked, "Why is it that you were not coming?" I said, "We were not able to have darshan with you, so we did not come." He said, "The reason I don't come out is because I don't want to come between Chandi Ma and the devotees. You should meet Her directly." I said, "But I don't want Chandi Ma without you." Then he said, "What is this you are saying? Does the guru's body last forever? But Ma is always there." I replied that I was not very educated and I didn't know about all this. I am an illiterate creature and all I know is that I want you even after I die and I want you even after you die. We have no existence without you. Not one breath will we be able to draw without you.' Then, there was the same laugh and



again that same statement, “Oh, come on! My heart is like that of a monkey. Don’t you try to trap me!”

In love, every ‘no’ really means ‘yes’. This is not Vedanta where everything is *Neti, Neti* – not this, not this. When Sri Swamiji told us, ‘Go on, get away now’ he was telling us that we had a special place in his heart. He will never drive us away; he will always keep us close to his heart.

Then the day of his mahasamadhi dawned. I felt that my whole world was devastated. What shall I do, where shall I go? For almost one month and half, anything I ate tasted like mud, nothing had any taste or flavour. Sleep, hunger, they had simply fled from my life. Then one day there was a phone call from Swami Satsangi, “You have to come and do katha during Ram Navami in Rikhia.” I said, “What will I come there for now? What is there for me?” Sometimes when I used to think of him, the link was there, but even that was gone from my hands. As if everything had turned dark. But she said, “*Arrey!* Why don’t you come and see for yourself, just come once?” I went but felt terribly desolate the first day, I cried a lot. I went to his Samadhi Sthal.

Then after that, for the entire nine days of the program, he gave us proof that he was still very much there, for we received undeniable, irrefutable signs and messages of his abiding presence. Around that time, I had written to Swami Niranjana saying, ‘It’s all right for you people, you are all *nirgunis*, you see the formless, you believe that he is everywhere. But what about us *sagunis*? We miss that smile, that look. Where shall we search for it? Where are we to go? What are we to do?’ Then when we went to Rikhia, we got everything and the heart was full of joy and peace.

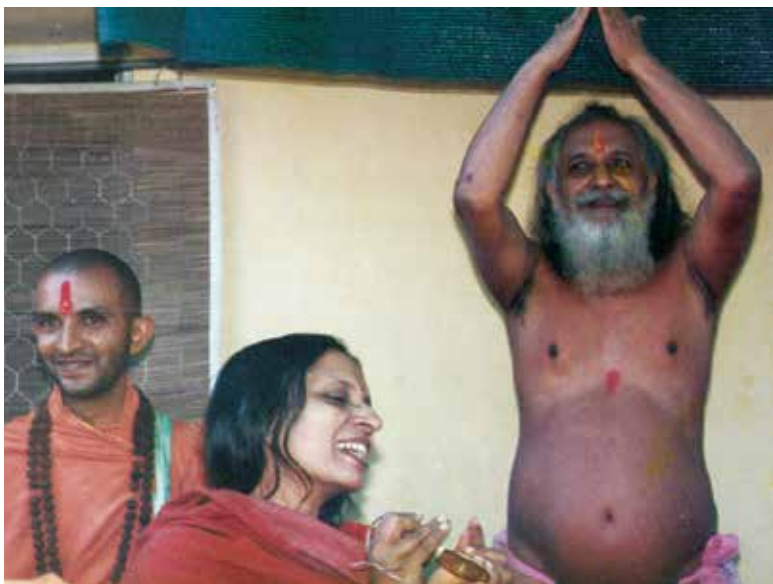
Now we truly experience that he is always with us, and not only with us but with our children and all devotees everywhere. How can he ever go away? There is the instance in the *Srimad Bhagavad* when it is Dhruva’s time to leave the body. He simply steps onto the shoulders of Death and goes straight to the Lord. Those who can step on the shoulders of Death and go to the Lord, do they ever really leave and what

harm can death do to them? They only go on to become even more powerful. Oh Gurudev! Make us good in every way and keep us safe always. Keep us from making mistakes. Look after us and always be with us.

If I keep searching, perhaps I might even find someone
But who will ever love me like you did?

That love, that affection, that compassion and care – he was the divine incarnate and he is always with us. We are extremely fortunate that he has left us an eternal treasure in the form of Swami Niranjan. A little while ago, I was telling Swami Niranjan not to perform the panchagni sadhana. After all, we still only think and speak according to our own standards but he does not think like that. He heard me out and then replied with a laugh, “I will have to respect the loin cloth that has been left to me as his legacy, won’t I?”

A thousand prostrations at the lotus-feet of our Gurudev Satyanandaji! Again and again we beseech you, bless us with your love.



SWAMI SIVAMURTI SARASWATI

Australia/Greece

Swami Sivamurti was born in 1951 in Sydney, Australia. Her spiritual quest led her to BSY in 1975 where she met Swami Satyananda. Initiated by Sri Swamiji into poorna sannyasa in 1976, the following year she was sent to Greece with the mission to spread the teachings of Satyananda Yoga there. She held classes and lectures in many cities around Greece and founded the Satyanandashram, Hellas in 1978. In the late 70s and early 80s, Sri Swamiji and Swami Niranjanananda visited Greece several times and many yoga centres were established. In 1984, the Satyanandashram Hellas was established in Paiania and as acharya and director Swami Sivamurti continues to guide the activities there. Along with her work in Greece, Swami Sivamurti has worked to establish Satyananda Yoga in many other countries in Europe and is actively involved in the yoga movement.

I was a spiritual seeker with a deep need to find answers to the questions of life. I wrote to about ten different ashrams in India. I didn't know them but had just picked the names out of a directory. Something in the letter that I received as a reply from the Bihar School of Yoga attracted me, so I chose to go there. After travel by air, rail and road, I arrived at the old BSY one evening. I knew nothing about Sri Swamiji, I didn't even know the name 'Swamiji', I didn't have any understanding of what an ashram was, I had no inkling. I went in just before dinner and everyone was eating. I joined them, they made me feel very comfortable and at home.

Although I felt like a fish out of water because everything seemed so totally strange to me. This was in 1975.

When I asked who was in charge, the reply from everyone was “Swamiji” and that he was away. On asking when he would be back, I was told, “At the right time!” All these answers were extremely strange to me. The days passed, the weeks passed and still Sri Swamiji had not returned. I remember writing in my diary, ‘I think I have come to the wrong place’. I spent the time doing karma yoga and asking the different swamis there ‘Who is this Swamiji that we were all waiting for?’ Although they did not give any direct answers, it was the expression in their eyes that was so inspiring that I thought ‘I have to stay, however long it takes, and meet this person’.

After about three and a half weeks, there was a tooting at the gate, everyone rushed in that direction apart from me because I didn’t know what was happening. There were few people in the ashram at that time and I was one of the few foreigners. The news came around that Sri Swamiji had arrived. It was just before lunch, the bell went and I went for lunch. Swami Atmananda came rushing up to me and said, “Swamiji is calling you,” and I was gripped by a sudden fear. Somehow subconsciously I realized that I was going to meet a person who was going to change my life and turn it all around and upside down. He was sitting in a small tent with other swamis. The impact of that first meeting is still with me today. I was engulfed in waves of an experience I have never had in my life before and I have never had it since. An overwhelming experience of bliss and love and everything I had been searching for. I realized I was meeting the person I had been looking for all my life.

I had so many questions but they had all vanished. He spoke to me like you would speak to a small child to make them feel comfortable, asking me how I was, whether I was comfortable, did I have any problems, did I need to go out of the ashram, was I finding it restricting being in one place for so long. I answered in monosyllables because there was

this overwhelming feeling washing through me. After this short conversation of me answering in monosyllables and him asking various commonplace questions, he said to make myself comfortable, to live here, to learn as much as I could and to spend as much time as I liked and to feel at home. That moment changed my whole life.

I stayed for about three months and Sri Swamiji arranged for me to have yoga classes every day. I got karma yoga in the Press and I loved painting the dust covers for his books because I used to paint a lot before I came to the ashram. The days passed by like that. Although I learnt a lot about yoga there, the highlight of those times was actually being in Sri Swamiji's presence. He had a very small room called Gokul and a few of us used to gather there in the evenings. He would talk to us on various spiritual topics or things about yoga or ask us different questions. Those were the real learning moments, just being in his presence. Or sometimes during the day, he would call me and start a conversation out of the blue on some fascinating topic.

Every moment was an inspiration; I was totally inspired by him. He said to me one day, "I will inspire you and that inspiration is love." Just before I left, his last words to me were, "Parting will not bring pain, it will bring joy." He knew that I had a deep love for Greece and the Greek people, I





had studied a lot about Greek culture, architecture and art. He said to me, “See whether the Greek people would be interested in yoga and be prepared for anything. Lectures, summer camps, TV, travel. Start in a small way, in a small place and then go wherever the need is. Everything will happen for your good, there will be nothing negative.”

When he said these fantastic statements that changed my life, I was thinking, ‘How can there ever be anything negative with Swamiji around? Everything is just so perfect’. Those two sentences guided me and helped me through all the challenges that I later faced in establishing and bringing Satyananda Yoga to Greece.

I went back to Australia before going to Greece. When he told me to be prepared for anything, I asked, “Will you come to Greece, Swamiji?” He said, “No. I will never come to Greece.” My heart sank and I thought, ‘How am I going to manage?’ When I was in Greece, I heard that he was visiting Barcelona after a few months, so I asked his permission if I could meet him there and he agreed. I went there and thought I would pop that question again. I said, “Swamiji, will you come to Greece?” and he said, “Of course, I’ll come to Greece.” He said, “Invite Swami Niranjan to prepare the way.”

I still remember the very first meeting with Swami Niranjan. He had some difficulty at the airport getting through because in those days in Greece there was a lot of difficulty with bureaucracy and getting people into the country. He was delayed coming through and when he did, it was like a glow of light. He was all in geru with a beautiful turban on his head. He stayed in Greece for some time and gave lectures in the south of Greece where I was establishing the yoga centre and in Athens. We toured around Greece as well.

The Greeks also have their own spiritual tradition and they are religious people, they have a lot of faith and belief, they are very warm and open to this. They loved Sri Swamiji and he visited Greece many times. I was lucky that he arranged for me to be in Greece. One day in Salonika he turned to me and said, "Sivamurti, the Greeks are bhaktas." I thought, "That's great! I am in the right place." Another time he said to me, "It's time to establish an ashram outside the city, in the country." He gave me directions to look within a 23 kilometre radius around Athens. So I drew up a circle on a map and sent different swamis out there. After a few weeks, two swamis came back and said, "We are sure we have found the right place." When I went there, I immediately felt that it was the right place so I spoke with Sri Swamiji. He asked me about every tree, every plant, everything on the land. We spoke for about three-quarters of an hour; he asked me every detail. I was on tenterhooks, thinking, 'Is he going to say yes or is he going to say no?' and he said, "Yes." That is the place where we now have the ashram in Paiania.

I travelled a lot with Swamiji and I learnt so much on those trips, especially from the way he conducted himself with different people and different situations. He would speak to everyone on their level. I remember being in Spain, he visited Spain quite frequently, he was with a group of psychologists and psychiatrists and he was talking on their level. I remember one man just came up to him and said, "Oh Swamiji, I have fallen in love with your mind!"

Another time in Europe, and this has stayed in my mind very clearly, he gave a lecture on the *Bhagavad Gita*. There was a man in the audience who had a different viewpoint. There must have been about 500 people at the lecture and as we were walking out, this man started to run down the stairs and in a loud voice said, “I disagree! Krishna said that or Arjuna said that or the interpretation should be this.” Everyone froze.

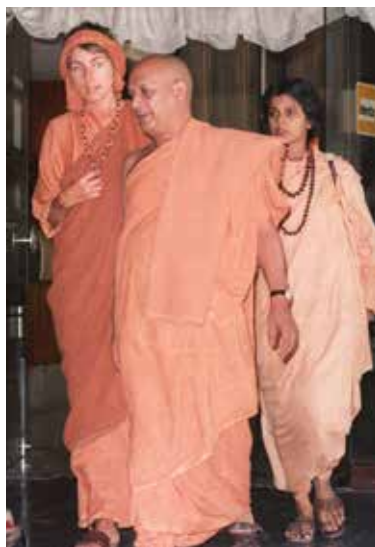
We were new disciples at the time and I remember thinking, ‘What can I do?’ Sri Swamiji was in complete control of the situation. As the man came closer with all these opposing opinions, he just kept saying, “You’re right. You’re absolutely right.” The man went on about Krishna and Arjuna, “You’re right,” Sri Swamiji said, “You’re absolutely right.” Eventually that got through to the man and he said, “I’m right? You think I’m right?” Sri Swamiji said, “Yes, yes. It’s a good point. You’re right.” All his aggression defused, this man came up to Sri Swamiji and said, “Can we discuss this further? I would like to hear your viewpoint on this.” And they went out together, side by side, discussing this.

The way he handled public criticism – for me that was a magnificent example to follow. His humility and his greatness in a public situation, facing opposition and how he handled it and how he won the man over just by being himself, his inimitable self. He lived exactly as he taught! There are so many moments . . .

I came back to Munger at least a few times a year and spent long periods of time with Sri Swamiji. From the beginning the guru-disciple relationship interested me more than yoga, though I knew nothing about it when I first arrived at BSY. Then came the concept of sannyasa and a notice went up, encouraging people and speaking about sannyasa in a way that was challenging and inspiring. I remember looking at the notice and thinking, ‘I would really like that’. I just turned around to find Sri Swamiji right behind me, looking directly at me. I realized that this was the direction in which my life was going. When he gave me sannyasa, he said that everything would

take place on the mental plane, to be prepared. All the communications, everything like that, would be on the mental plane, which was exactly what I needed because I was living in Greece so far from him. I had to establish that connection early on other than just meeting him and being with him, although that was what I wanted to do.

There is one moment in Ganga Darshan from one of my regular trips. A few of us used to have tea with Sri



Swamiji which was the highlight of the day. We used to sit in Kutir and be served tea. Different swamis had different duties but as I was coming from Greece, I didn't know who had what duty. It seemed like the most natural thing for me, at the end of the tea, to ask if I could clean the cups. One swami took particular objection to this. She didn't like that at all and she grabbed my cup. I realized I was taking her duty but it was also that I felt jealousy. It was right in front of Sri Swamiji and I remember thinking, 'What's going to happen now? That is not the type of thing he likes, he might stop the teas. We might not be invited the next day.' So I felt, 'What can I do?' We all went out after tea and this was in my mind.

At that time, different swamis had garden plots and being a visitor, I didn't have a plot. That swami had her plot somewhere not far from the Kutir. It was a barren lot with lots of rocks on it. I thought I would go and see if I could help her with the land. It was difficult for me. I said, "I don't have a garden plot. Can I do anything here?" She said, "Pick up the stones." I could feel her softening a little bit and just then I caught a glimpse of Swamiji who came running across

the lawn. When he reached me, he said, “That’s the way!” Of course, to everyone else it looked like I was picking up stones in the right way, but he was communicating to me on another level that the particular choice had been the right one.

Those teachings were so beautiful because I understood that he knew exactly what was going on in my mind. At times it was embarrassing, at other times it was extremely comforting. In the long run, it is so comforting to know that he knows exactly what is in your mind, who you are and he still accepts you and loves you anyway. It is the same with Swami Niranjan.

I was in Ganga Darshan when Sri Swamiji left Munger on that day in 1988. I didn’t really understand the concept because I didn’t really think that he would not be coming back. I just understood that he would be leaving but I didn’t know that he was not going to ever return. I just felt that he was going away for some period of time and I accepted it like that. When I heard that it was a long-term thing, the next thought in my mind was ‘Where to find him?’ Slowly news began to come through about his travels and his experiences in issues of the *YOGA* magazine. I had that inner connection with him and that he had said that everything would happen for my good. and he had told me that he was my guru and I was his disciple, I never doubted that. I always had the faith that wherever he was, there would still be that connection.

The next time I saw him was when I was in Munger and I was called to Rikhia. I did not know what was happening. Swami Satsangi was there, it was dark, I had arrived at night. She grabbed me by the hand and rushed me through to where he was sitting by the dhuni, where the panchagni sadhana eventually took place. There were a few other shapes in the shadows but I had eyes only for him! He said, “Say *Namo Narayana*,” so I said, “*Namo Narayana*,” and did my pranams. Then he said a few things. Swami Satsangi grabbed me by the hand again and I was rushed out. I did not see him again until later when the ashram opened in 1993 and I went back regularly a few times a year.

Everything seemed strange then but before he started his sadhanas, he was available like he had been in Munger at Ganga Darshan. We could talk to him and there were small groups of people so it was quite intimate. We could discuss things like we had in the past. As the time passed and he went deeper into his sadhana, the yajnas started, more and more people became attracted to them. It was difficult because those intimate moments were not possible anymore. Everything had to happen on the more mental, spiritual level. One time when I went to do my pranam to him in one of the earlier times, he said to me, very quickly, "Everything is changing." He gave me that hint that not to worry about anything. I always felt his presence and his protection.

Another poignant moment was in 1995. I was sitting close to Sri Swamiji and Swami Niranjan and tears were coming from Swami Niranjan's eyes. I was watching him and thinking, 'How can anyone look so beautiful with such a serene face and allow tears to fall'. When most of us cry, we look a mess, he looked beautiful and radiant. It was a very inspiring and beautiful moment and I was lucky, privileged to be there. I see Sri Swamiji in Swami Niranjan and that happens more each time I come, the same expression, the same look. He speaks to me, handles me and behaves with me in the same way that Sri Swamiji did. It brings tears to my eyes just thinking about it. Swami Niranjan for me is Sri Swamiji. Memories come back about different times and different things we experienced together. I feel Swamiji's presence in Munger, I feel his presence in Rikhia. I feel Sri Swamiji's presence generally, but it is intensified when I am with Swami Niranjan. Sri Swamiji changed my life, turned it around and put it back on higher ground.

During his mahasamadhi, we had just left Rikhia and come to Munger. When I heard about the mahasamadhi I went straight back. I was numb. I couldn't really accept it, there was almost a denial, I suppose. I couldn't really believe that this was happening. There were so many things that I wanted to say, that I had never said. On the 6th, I couldn't

stop crying. The tears wouldn't stop no matter how much I tried, they just came. We stayed on for the rituals and then came for the programs that were held in Munger. Gradually reasoning took over and I started to remember all the things that he had said to me. I realized that nothing had changed although the world would never be the same again because he is not here physically. But still the relationship was there.

I feel his presence. I know he is there and whenever I need him, he is always there. And we have Swami Niranjan! When Sri Swamiji left in 1988, and when the ashram opened again at Ganga Darshan, I came back. It was so wonderful to be with Swami Niranjan. Although I travelled with Sri Swamiji and Swami Niranjan to many parts of the world and I have attended so many lectures, the real learning experience for me in sannyasa and the guru-disciple relationship has been outside the classroom. Sri Swamiji taught me that way. I did not want that training to stop and it continues with Swami Niranjan. That is the beauty for me in this spiritual life.



SWAMI ALAKHMURTI SARASWATI

Australia

Swami Alakhmurti Saraswati Analda was born in 1950 in Australia. She received poorna sannyasa in 1977 and lived as a resident in BSY till 1986. Her ashram seva included photography as well as in teaching tattwa shuddhi, teacher training and kriya yoga courses. She continues to teach yoga in Australia where she is living now.

In 1976, I came back to Australia after living in England. At that time, there were no swamis, no gurus, no ashrams in Australia. Not that there were many swamis or yoga teachers, ashrams or gurus in England either, though it was slowly beginning to happen. When I came back to spend some time with my family I found that they were all doing yoga! I wondered, 'Why are they doing yoga, they are not sick'. I had grown up with a lot of interest in philosophy within a family who understood that the mind is stronger than the body, thoughts are stronger than the mind. Our background was Christian and if you wanted to get some training in spiritual affairs, it automatically involved Christianity.

One day my mother said to me, "Your brother went down to Sydney and met this woman from India. She gave him a 'word' and when he came back, his eyes were shining." We still thought yoga was Indian at that stage. My family was living in a place called Toowoomba, a small town in Queensland, away from the cities. They were going off to

these yoga classes so I thought, 'Oh well, I'll go too. I'm only home for a few weeks'.

It was a bit of a miracle story because the teacher and her husband had been to an ashram in India and they had a 'guru'. The story is quite remarkable because the husband had been an army major in Vietnam. He had gone through so much stress that he had four heart attacks and had retired from the army. The couple came back to Australia and after some time, they found out about this person who had lived in an ashram in India. This couple came to India and when returned to Australia, he was okay. He was taught pawanmuktasana and certain practices and when they returned, they started teaching yoga in Toowoomba.

So here I am, flown in from England for a few weeks, going off to do these classes, standing on my head and also doing trataka in my very first class. After some time, they invited a swami to come and live near Sydney. I had decided to stay on in Australia as well and he came to live at the same place where I was living. A friend of mine and I used to go off to yoga class and have some dinner afterwards. This was in 1975 when Swami Gorakhnath was sent to Australia and there were three young Indian swamis living in Australia. Then Swami Gorakhnath spoke to me about coming to India. That went right into my brain and I couldn't get it out.

In 1976, I came to participate in the kriya yoga course. We had these fantasies about the ashram: we would be sitting under the trees, meditating all day and getting enlightened really quickly. Luckily, one or two people who had been to an ashram told us, "Oh no! You work all day, you work." I asked, "We work?" "Yes, you work!" And what's more, I thought, 'Well, that's all right. I will be able to see Sri Swamiji all the time.' They said "Oh, no. Sometimes you go and you don't even see him."

In 1976, with minimum expectations, I arrived at Munger station after two nights travelling, and I was a bit low. People were looking at me and I had no idea what to do once I got to Munger. This swami came up to me and said,

“Ashram?” I said, “Yes!” He said, “Wait,” and he disappeared. I was sitting there with a sea of faces looking at me while I was trying to read a book. Finally, he came back with a big basket of mangoes for the ashram. He says, “Get in the taxi with me.” I got in the taxi with him and the mangoes, and then all these extra people got in too, and we drove and drove and drove . . .

The gates opened and a swami came out, “Have a bath.” I got my suitcase out, looked around and saw Sri Swamiji standing right there. I said, “Oh, already! Not bad, just arrived.” I got in the shower and I felt, ‘I’m home’. I really felt at home but it was a strange feeling because it didn’t look like home, it was the old BSY, but the feeling grew. Sri Swamiji put me in ‘Sky’, as it was called, a little residential area. I would walk every day to the ashram in the morning for the kriya yoga course and this went on for a month. Every morning, Sri Swamiji would be sitting on the grass at four o’clock and I would go to have the class. I started to realize that he was there every morning at four. What would happen if I came at three? He was there. I used to sit there and sometimes I would be the only one, just him, another swami and I, just sitting there. It was very special.

He loved sitting on the lawn in the early morning especially in June. We had the privilege of being the people who came in those early years, having breakfast, lunch and dinner with Sri Swamiji. After dinner we would go in and sit with him, he would chat or he would give us work or talk to us and tell jokes.

After the kriya yoga course, I didn’t really want to go back to Australia but I had duties and responsibilities. I thought, ‘If I ring Swamiji from Kolkata airport and he says ‘Come back’, I’ll come back’. I had enough money to get back from Kolkata, where I had this crisis of mind. I rang up Sri Swamiji on the phone, “Swamiji, do I go to Australia?” and the other unspoken words were ‘Or can I come back?’ Sri Swamiji said, “Hari Om Tat Sat!” After all, it was my life and he is not going to tell me what to do.



I did go back to Australia and I practised kriya yoga every day for one year, and my mind started changing completely. Everything started changing completely. After some time, I was on a plane on my way back to India with all my affairs finished off, money given away. From 1977 to 1986, I lived first at Bihar School of Yoga, the old BSY, and then Sri Swamiji got the land on which Ganga Darshan was built.

In the beginning, there was this great big colonial building just where the Jyoti Mandir is now, the hall was roughly the same size and shape. It was a broken-down building and there were rickshaw wallahs and all sorts of people living here. Sri Swamiji gently moved us in there. He said, "Beautiful earth here, we will grow vegetables and plant trees." So we were having digging parties. Sri Swamiji had a grass and bamboo platform. We would be sitting there and he would say, "We are going to do this and going to do that and going do this." And of course, it's more than done now, it's hugely developed and still developing.

It is home, home for everybody, everybody who takes sannyasa. At that time, there was poorna sannyasa and we were getting really interested in sannyasa. Sri Swamiji was absolutely astounding in his innovation, because, from what



I understood, he was one of the first to initiate westerners, the first to initiate females. Then he created karma sannyasa so that people who had that love and wanted to direct it and couldn't because of their family commitments could still participate. This is a *sangha*, a community, we are all brothers and sisters in this huge body and movement where we can direct our love into spiritual development, whether we are married, single, never going to live in the ashram, sometimes going to visit the ashram. Sri Swamiji developed that amazingly all to meet our needs. An extremely creative solution because he did not break the tradition, he brought in a modern interpretation. The modern manipulative interpretation was broken by him.

It was extraordinary. When I did go back to Australia, there were karma sannyasins teaching in every town, beautiful ashrams in every city. Australians could get access to these beautiful, integrated teaching, not just the asana and pranayama, but kirtan, meditation, karma yoga, the shatkarmas, and preparation for kriya yoga. If Sri Swamiji had never taken birth, I don't know what I would have done, what would my life be like? What would I do with my energy and my intention to be of service?

Thank you for inspiring and guiding me, Sri Swamiji!

SWAMI ATMABHISHEK SARASWATI

India

Swami Atmabhishek was born in 1936 in Uttar Pradesh, India. He was initiated into poorna sannyasa in 2008 and lived at Ganga Darshan, offering his seva through teaching as well as conducting yoga shivirs around the country. He has authored 'Mere Pranadhar', a book on his association with Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati. Currently he lives near Delhi and visits the ashram whenever possible.

I had met many persons in geru but I had been disappointed. I was looking for a guru, a guide, to lead me onto the right path. One day, in a sad mood, I went to sleep. In a dream I asked God to help me for I was tired of looking for such persons. I felt that in this life I was going to die without a guru. After that I started crying. It was a dream but it seemed real tears came from my eyes. Maybe I continued crying for a few hours. That is how my pillow was completely drenched. I found that my cry was heard by God. From that day onwards, events unfolded which led me to leave my job at the age of forty. Nobody does it, particularly in those days. I joined the Government of India, Directory of General Mine Safety, Dhanbad in 1976. In 1977, a swami from the ashram in Dhanbad that was affiliated to the Bihar School of Yoga came to conduct a yoga class at the Officer's Club. After meeting him and spending some time with him, I was incredibly impressed. I told him, "It appears my search for a guru is over. I don't have to search anymore. I have to

meet your guru now! Please arrange for me to meet him at the earliest.” He told me, “You can go to Munger but he is very busy. Maybe when you go there, he might be travelling. I advise you to stay back in Dhanbad. Next year there will be a four-day convention which will be held here. You will see him, you will hear him, and if you want you can also get initiation from him.”



For one year I waited very keenly. I took four days leave from work so that I could attend every day of the convention. I used to reach the venue early in the morning and I would not leave till the last program of the day. On the third day it was announced that there was going to be initiation. Immediately I signed up and I got initiated. I saw him for the first time in my life on the first day and on the third day, I was initiated by him. I became a proud disciple of Sri Swamiji.

In 1981, Guru Poornima was celebrated in Jabalpur and I attended that program. We reached a day before the program was due to commence. There was a Gurudwara close to the venue and a group of Sardarjis came and

requested Sri Swamiji, “Please bless our Gurudwara, please visit and say a few words to us, we will be highly obliged.” Sri Swamiji, “Tomorrow 4.30 in the morning I will come.” We were all told to be ready by 4 and that we would be guided. We all went to the Gurudwara and Sri Swamiji gave a discourse there for half an hour – and a miracle happened! After Sri Swamiji’s discourse, the leader of this group said, “I offer to look after all the delegates of the convention from now on until it ends. We will prepare food; breakfast, lunch, dinner for you and we will also serve you.” When they were told that we had already purchased all the necessary material, he said, “You give me the bills, we will make one hundred percent payment to you as if we have purchased it. We will take it over.” For those four days the Sardarjis looked after us wonderfully. This I take as a miracle because just a half-hour talk in the Gurudwara and instantaneously, without any prior preparation or thinking, they made such a generous offer.

On the third day, there was another big event. In the evening session there were about five thousand people sitting in that hall. Sri Swamiji was talking about kundalini awakening and he said, “If I want then I can awaken kundalini of everybody sitting here right at this moment.” I don’t think he has ever made such declaration before, or even after. I was astonished. Then he said, “I will not do so, because kundalini can be awakened, but you are not prepared to handle it. So, I will not do it.”

There is an amazing story about the Sat Chandi Yajna that was held in 1995. It was the first Sat Chandi Yajna and was celebrated for nine days. This story was also recounted at Ganga Darshan by Swami Niranjanananda himself. He said, “Three miracles had happened at the first Sat Chandi Yajna in Rikhia.”

The first miracle was that on the first day, there were three birds, which were commonly not seen in that area, sitting above the yajna mandap from where the smoke would go out. These three birds came on the morning of the first

day, they were there the whole day and they maintained their presence for all the nine days. There was so much noise, chanting and smoke when the yajna was taking place there; in spite of all that, those birds continued to be there for nine days. Who they were we don't know; but definitely they were not ordinary birds; they were something else, somebody who came in the form of birds to watch the Sat Chandi proceedings.

The second miracle was to do with food. Provisions were bought for thirteen pandits who had come from Varanasi plus a few persons and those who were permanently staying in Rikhia. Precise calculations were made for ten days and each item was purchased exactly as per the requirement: flour, rice, dal, other things. During the Sat Chandi Yajna different bags of provisions were opened and materials used during that time. When the yajna was over, Swamiji said, "I personally went to the kitchen store, collected all the items – flour into flour, rice into rice, dal into dal – and I found that the quantity that was left over was almost equal to what had been purchased. I found that all the items which were tallied after consumption of ten days, they were even more in quantity than which was purchased." How could this happen? It's anybody's guess. Swamiji said, "In the *Ramayana*, when Sita's marriage was going to be held, Sita sent the riddhis and siddhis to look after the wedding guests." Maybe Sri Swamiji also called them here!

The third most interesting story is this: Smt. Krishna Deviji was invited for a discourse on the *Ramayana* during the yajna. Since there was no accommodation facility in Rikhia, she was staying at a hotel in Deoghar and a car used to fetch her every day. One day the car was delayed and Krishna Devi became a little worried because she knew that Sri Swamiji was very particular about punctuality. She came out of the hotel and stood beside the road. Suddenly one vehicle came. It was empty except for one lady who was the passenger and the driver. That lady stopped and asked her, "Would you like to go to Rikhia?" Krishna Devi said, "Yes,

definitely, I would like to go to Rikhia.” The lady said, “I’ll drop you.” On the way they chatted about Sri Swamiji, about yajna, this and that. When they reached, the car stopped at some distance from the gate. Krishna Devi was impressed by that lady and said, “Please wait here. I’ll go quickly and talk to Swami Niranjana, we will ensure that you are seated properly in the program. So, please wait in the car.”

Krishna Devi went in hurriedly because she thought she was already late. Swami Niranjana was right near the gate and asked, “What happened?” She said that she would explain later, but one lady had brought her. “I want you to meet her, and please ensure that she gets a proper place in the program.” Swami Niranjana came out with Krishna Devi and walked to the place where she had got out of the car. There was neither any car, nor any lady to be seen. Swamiji immediately sent sannyasins this way, that way, “Look for some vehicle like this and one lady sitting there.” She was not to be found!

In 1992, we were not allowed to visit Rikhia. In Dhanbad I got the news that in the winter months, when Swamiji was not doing panchagni, he met people sometimes. I took a chance and. I came to Jasidih. At the railway station I met some ten people. We got talking and found that we were all intending to go to Rikhia. In those days it was not very easy to get to there. We all hired one vehicle and when we reached, one or two people were already waiting at the gate. The person on duty said, “No darshan. You are not supposed to come here. This is Sri Swamiji’s strict instruction. Why have you come?” We said, “Let us have darshan of this gate at least, that is enough.” At that time Ganesh Kutir was a little hut with mud plaster and a thatched roof. Sri Swamiji was sitting on the verandah of that hut. He probably could overhear that some people were waiting outside. He called the person on duty and said, “Note down all the names and places of whoever has come.” When he came and asked for our names, we were happy – it meant we were going to get entry! Sri Swamiji called all of us in to see him.

When we were having darshan, someone asked, “Swamiji, when are you coming to Munger?” Sri Swamiji said, “I am not going to come to Munger for this has been my nature. I left my home, I did not look back. I left my Guru’s ashram, I did not go back. Now that I have left Munger, I’m not going to go back. Moreover, why do you want me in Munger? I’m getting old; naturally old people get sick. Do you want me to fall sick, lying on the bed with saline from one end and oxygen from another, with the doctor is standing there, and all of you surrounding me with eyes full of tears? That is never going to happen.” His words were so wonderful. Then he said, “If I die like this, lying down on the bed, then whatever I have taught all these years will go down the drain.” And then he declared, “I will not die lying down on the bed, I will die sitting in padmasana and my prana will leave through brahmarandra, there is no other passage. This is the way I’m going to die.”

Seventeen years before he took mahasamadhi, he had taken this sankalpa. Perhaps even earlier, but this is what I heard seventeen years before 2009. That ‘I will go like this’, and it is what exactly happened on 5th December 2009. Anyone who can say something like this is incredible and only Sri Swamiji could do it. And he did it. He showed that he could live up to his words.



SWAMI ANANDANANDA SARASWATI

Italy

Born in Ethiopia in 1951, Swami Anandananda met Sri Swamiji in Australia in 1979. As per Sri Swamiji's instructions, he went to Italy and started to teach yoga. He was initiated into poorna sannyasa in 1983. Since then, he has organized many events for Sri Swamiji in Italy as well as worldwide. He established the Scuola di Yoga Satyananda Ashram Italia and founded an organization for the translation and distribution of BSY publications in Italian. As acharya of the Italian ashram, his work in the propagation of Satyananda Yoga in Italy continues to grow with courses, seminars, projects in schools and courses in specialized sectors.

In 1978, I was in Australia where I met a swami from Munger and came to know about Sri Swami Satyananda. I decided that I should meet him because this swami had made a strong impression on me. In May 1979, I went to a program in Sydney and saw Sri Swamiji for the first time. He was sitting on the stage and I was sitting way back inside this huge tent. He sang a kirtan, gave a lecture but I do not remember what the lecture was about. The next day there was mantra diksha and I went to receive mantra diksha from him. There was a long queue despite heavy rain and I went in with my dripping socks leaving mud and water on the floor behind me. Sri Swamiji was sitting beside a small fire. My mind went blank. I had so many questions but nothing came. He kept asking me, "What else?" I said, "Mantra," so

he gave me the mantra, “What else?” He gave me the symbol and asked, “What else?” Then I remembered, “Oh, name!” “Okay, name.”

In November 1979, I left everything behind and came to Munger. When I met Sri Swamiji, I found what I was looking for in my life: a proper direction that was worth living for. There was no better mission for me than to be working for Sri Swamiji and his mission of giving yoga to the world and to humanity. I wanted to help him and contribute. At that time, he used to spend the day in a tent in the old ashram in Munger. I started to translate the first book in Italian, sitting at a desk next to his tent. I slowly began to know a bit more about guru, tradition and Sri Swami Satyananda.

At one point I had to go out of India to renew my visa and I went to Nepal where I met a very old friend of mine. I talked to him about Swami Satyananda and Munger and he also decided to come back with me. When we came through the gate, I was the first one to enter. Sri Swamiji was in the tent and I went straight to him to offer my pranams. He asked me, “Did you come alone?” He knew I had come with someone else! That person, in the course of time, also became connected, took sannyasa and lived for some time in the ashram. Sri Swamiji knew because he asked me, “Did you come alone?”

I began to realize how his mind, his awareness and his being functioned. There have been many such instances, events and situations. He had such an open and powerful mind but at the same time, he would behave as if he was just normal. He would make everything matter of fact, almost like a coincidence.

Sri Swamiji had this ability to put somebody in very big difficulties and he also had the ability to get him or her out of that difficulty. In 1983, I was in Munger and one evening, Sri Swamiji called me to Kutir, “You have to take this girl to Delhi, she is going back home. Arrange the tickets, put her on the flight, see that she goes home and then you come back.” He gave me one little purse with two train tickets and

five hundred rupees. He said, "When you reach Delhi you go to this address. There is one person who is associated with the ashram. You go to him; he will look after you."

We reached Delhi and went to the address which was very far away. A person wearing geru said, "Ah, welcome." He took the girl's luggage and said, "Now you can go back to Munger. I will look after her." I said, "I have these instructions. Swamiji told *me* to put her on the flight and then go back to Munger. If she is still here, how can I leave?" After some more arguing, he said, "You can stay."

He had a very small place, just one room, so he put us in a dharmashala nearby. They gave us one room each, basic and small. The girl was quiet and very nice. The next morning, I went to the travel agent to arrange for the ticket. Suddenly this girl said, "I don't want to go back to my country." I said, "Look, you have to go back. Your father is sending the ticket. You have to go, Sri Swamiji said so." She insisted and I insisted, then she started crying. At the airline we were told, "No, there is no ticket here."

At the dharmashala, the man had told everyone that I was a bad person, treating this girl badly and that she was sad and crying the whole time. At lunch, this man gave nice food to the girl and the other people, and he just threw something to me. At dinner time, same story again. She was crying, and I was told to leave the dharamshala because I was a bad person. The next day, same story – no ticket. The girl said, "I want new clothes. I want to go to the movies." I said, "We have no money. You can do that when you are in your country." She started crying again in the middle of the street. She was making a scene and all the people were looking at me.

At dinner, the hosts threw one chapatti and one banana at me. The whole night I was thinking, 'What am I going to do? If tomorrow there is no ticket, there is a big problem'. Finally, on the third day her ticket arrived. I went back to this dharmashala and was quite happy, my work was nearly finished.

The next morning, at breakfast we heard a car, then some knocking on the door. Who was standing there? Sri Swamiji! He walked in and said, "Did you get the ticket?" I said, "Yes. We have the ticket. Today afternoon she is leaving." "Ah, very good. I am going to the airport. She can come with me. I can take her to the airport." It was like 8.00, 8.30 in the morning.

Sri Swamiji, and the girl went to the car, Swami Satsangi was inside the car. Then Sri Swamiji said to me, "At what time is your train?" I said, "Tonight, 9 o'clock leaving from New Delhi station." He said, "Good. Then now you are free." When he said, "Now you are free," everything that had happened for three, four days, everything just vanished. I changed completely. He said, "Now you are free. Go."

I will always remember this. Sri Swamiji entered the car and was sitting at the back, Swami Satsangi and the girl were sitting in the front. As the car was moving, I saw Sri Swamiji turning around and smiling, 'Go, go, go, now you are free. I played you very nicely'. That is something which will always be with me in my mind. That car moving and Sri Swamiji turning and saying, 'Bye bye'.

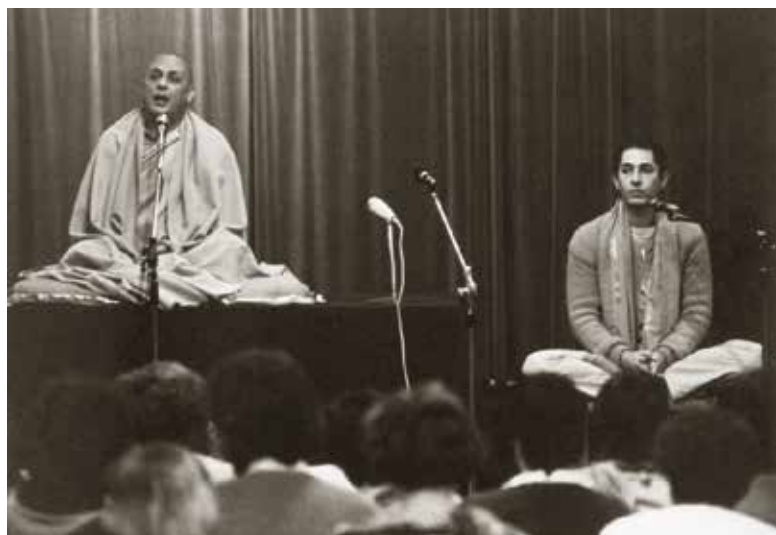
Many years ago in Italy, I was organizing a program for Sri Swamiji. I was young and I had strange ideas. I thought that until Swami Satyananda came to the program, I would be fasting with just lemons and water. I was doing this for about 2 or 3 weeks. When he came to know, he made me eat continuously for 2 to 3 days. Whenever some guest would come, he would say, "Take Ananda with you. Go to a restaurant and eat." Disciples would come from Spain with luggage full of Indian food. He would call me and say, "Come here and finish this. Eat this." He would order, "Give him more, give him more."

At another program, I had some other funny ideas about giving up coffee. I liked coffee very much and somehow I thought that I should not like it so much, maybe I should drink tea, some stupid, crazy ideas were revolving in my mind. Sri Swamiji came and one day we were in his hotel



room. There were other people present and he was sitting facing this group of people, speaking to them in Hindi, and I was sitting on the floor in the corner of the room. Then all of a sudden, he turned to me and said, “Tea and coffee is just the same,” and went back to Hindi and kept talking to the guests!

Thinking of Sri Swamiji, I find that it is not only the mind, awareness and knowledge but his total practicality. He could do everything and he knew how to do everything. Once in Munger we were shovelling, moving earth and he taught me how to hold the shovel and how to shovel. Other times, how to fold paper, how to count money. He knew everything. Any subject that was brought to him in satsang or even with his close disciples, any argument, any topic, any subject, he knew exactly the answer, the situation, and he had his view.



We disciples were full of different kinds of conditionings in the mind, like that thing about tea, coffee, fasting and so much more. He did not have any of those things. He was absolutely free, absolutely relaxed and he was constantly demonstrating that. His answer, behaviour, attitude was the absolutely correct, not at all conditioned, not at all according to what our logic, reasoning or understanding would have been.

Adapting was another quality. He came to Italy and when I was organizing programs for him he would just say, "I am coming on this day, send me the ticket." That was it. On that day, I would be there to pick him up. He would not ask anything in between, like 'Where do I sleep? Book me a room in a hotel', nothing. He would arrive and he would immediately adapt to the place, situation, language and people. We always made vegetarian food that was available in the country, he would never say that he did not like this or he would not eat that. Actually he would encourage other people, "Taste this, try that. Take some more of this."

Once we were driving from Torino to Trieste and we made a detour around the area of Milano, the north side of

Milano, where there were some lakes and nice views. We took the scenic route. As we were driving past one of the lakes, Sri Swamiji said, "In that lake there are trucks from the war, full of weapons, money, gold and other things." He said it and we carried on. After a few years, people discovered that the fascist parties had put trucks full of weapons, money and gold into the water there. And he had just said it like that, casually, while driving past.

One program was held in a city in a big flat and after the satsang, there was going to be lunch for Sri Swamiji. Since after the satsang there was going to be food, we placed different pots and pans, plates, all the necessary utensils in the corridor, so that as soon as the satsang was over, we could serve lunch. There was a handle of one ladle sticking out towards the middle and we must have walked past that ladle hundreds of times.

Finally, Sri Swamiji arrived at the flat and he went through the corridor to get to the hall. He was right in front of us, when he got to that ladle, he stopped and with one finger turned the spoon, put it in the right position and carried on. That is still fixed in my mind: with one finger he showed us that it would have taken one finger and five seconds to put it right, and he actually did it for us! He was a living example of what it is to be absolutely connected with the immediate reality, there was nothing that would escape his awareness, absolutely nothing.

I also felt that simultaneously he had a greater level of awareness, of consciousness, functioning at the same time. I saw Sri Swamiji giving mantra diksha and talking to people at the moment of diksha. People would come with different spiritual problems and whoever came in front of him, he would just close his eyes. Then he would open his eyes and say exactly what was appropriate, what was the right thing for this person.

Whenever Sri Swamiji had to travel, he used to be ready at least three hours before. Once we had a seminar and his flight was the next morning at 6 o'clock, that meant 3 o'clock

pick-up. Around 4.30 am, I suddenly woke up. Swamiji must have sent a message. I shouted loudly, "Swamiji!" and everybody woke up. We took the car to his hotel. He was standing there at the door with his luggage ready and I thought what is he going to tell me? As if nothing unusual had happened, we put the luggage in the car and off we went to the airport. He said absolutely nothing.

In Venice, I took him on a boat ride on the canal. I was going to rent a private boat so that he would be comfortable. He wanted to go in a boat which everybody takes. He was standing there on this boat, just like any other passenger, looking around. He was so very humble and there was never any showing off. His sense of humour was amazing, I mean everybody was touched by his laughter. It was absolutely contagious and real laughing.

During lectures, satsangs or seminars, he would be absolutely crystal clear, in a simple understandable language adapted to the people, to the public. That is one of the things that has always impressed me and that is one aspect that has been appreciated by thousands of people all over the world: the way in which he was able to convey deep subjects or topics in a simple, understandable, clear way, using the appropriate language for the audience.

I had the opportunity and good fortune of translating his lectures from English to Italian, sitting next to him. When he came to Italy and when I brought groups to Munger, I was translating from English to Italian. I cannot remember that at any time I had any difficulty in translating him. He was always clear, understandable, simple and to the point. If he would make a diversion, he would always come back to the point and make that point even clearer, much more understandable. I was sitting just next to him and I was translating, and that was an experience.

Whether he was talking of practices or techniques of yoga, whether it was something like philosophy, even if he was talking about scientific research, he never used complex scientific terminology, he never brought examples unrelated

to day-to-day life or people's social life. He would bring examples, words, sentences and explain it and you would get the point. It would never finish there because that was a stepping stone to inspiration, to encouragement, to stimulation, to give us that inspiration and that is what has been one of the important roles, aspects and functions of Sri Swamiji as a guru – to give inspiration.

Once in Zinal, there was Swami Satyananda, Swami Satchidananda, Swami Chidananda and some other yogis from India at a big convention. One day, we were all sitting under some trees in a nice beautiful place with paper plates, having a picnic. By the end of the meal, I was somehow spaced out, my mind stopped functioning. I was quite far from him, about 7 or 8 metres. I think he picked it up because at one point he said, "Swami Ananda, take all the plates and take them back inside." With that he brought me back to the present and I am still thinking about it, the same thing like the tea and coffee, how did he know? He picked it up and he shook me out of that space. He just grounded me.

My relationship with Sri Swamiji, whether in Munger, Rikhia or wherever, was always one that inspired optimism, positivity and inspiration. He said many times in satsangs, lectures or privately, "The sun is always rising over the horizon. The light is coming, there is nothing to worry about, be optimistic, there is more, there is more." Over the years, I would see that there was more to come and more to do and good, positive, useful things, looking to a bright future, to encouragement and inspiration.

I came to know about his leaving Ganga Darshan in 1988. I was in Italy at that time. I knew that Sri Swamiji had left Munger. For me, it was just a matter of knowing where he was. When he was in Munger, my mind knew 'that is where he is'. I just needed to know where he was. In December or January 1988 I came to India and people were saying that the ashram was closed. When I came, it was open, everything was just normal. Through Swami Niranjan I learnt that Sri Swamiji had left for a new phase of his life. Why should we



accept only the teachings, yoga and the philosophy? If we accept that, why don't we accept also the other things? There was just one corner of my mind that would have liked to know where he was, that's all.

In January 1989, we went to Allahabad at the Kumbha Mela and met Sri Swamiji. That was magical. For four, five days at the Kumbha Mela, from 6 o'clock in the morning until 6 o'clock at night, Sri Swamiji was walking like anything, in the middle of millions of people, going here and there. We would eat somewhere on the road and he had clear and precise places to go to and people who he wanted to meet. I had to keep up with him and do video and photos at the same time. I was carrying 10, 12 kilos of equipment.

We took bath at 3 o'clock in the morning on the specific day and that was amazing. We were about 6 or 7 people and Sri Swamiji said, "You guys go first. Leave everything here. Take your bath and come back." We dropped everything and just with one dhoti went off. There were millions of people, you couldn't see the river, the water, nothing. We went through the crowd through these wet people coming out

from the water, and went into the cold water. We took three dips and I turned around to the shore to go back but there was a wall of people, all wanting to take bath. I said, "Now where is Swamiji? How will we find him?" We worried that if we went in the wrong direction, we would never find him again. In the middle of all that, I heard his voice, "Come, let's go." We went straight there and he was waiting for us. He said, "Now I go." He went, together with Swami Niranjani and Swami Satsangi, and we stayed there with their clothes. They went, took bath and somehow they also came exactly to where we were waiting for them.

Every morning we would meet first at the Niranjani Akhara and have breakfast. All the talking was in Hindi and my only duty was to take photos and videos. After we had been at Niranjani Akhara, we would visit other mahants or mahamandaleshwars or Naga babas. At night we would visit different sadhus.

After taking bath at 3 o'clock, we were walking back and it felt as if Sri Swamiji had finished. At some point, he turned and said, "Ah, Ananda! You stay here and at sunrise, take the video because tomorrow is the highest number of people coming for bath. Go up the tower, take the video and then you are free to go." I was left there in the middle of 30 million people with the cameras and all these things.

The first time I went to Rikhia after he had gone there, it was like seeing Sri Swamiji in a completely different version. He was sitting in front of his tent, wearing his langoti and he felt really very happy to be there and to be doing whatever he had to do. I was trying to figure out or understand what all this was. It was quite a test for us to be able to maintain our balance of mind – in this situation and then in every other situation. It required balance of mind and I would be just there feeling happy to be there and to see him, no matter what. Whether he is wearing geru or just a langoti, with beard, without beard, with bhasma, without bhasma, as long as I could be there and see him and hear him say something. Sometimes he would not say a word.

One year after that, I came to Rikhia with two or three other people. It was around 4.30 in the morning. Paramahamsaji was sitting at his round dhuni, with his malas, his trumpet, rudrakshas on the head. Before I left Italy, some devotees had asked me to take letters for him. We were sitting with him and he was talking to people. I gave him the letters. He took them and just put them in the fire, as if to say, 'I have nothing to do with all this, I do not want anything to do with all this'. I understood.

The most memorable and touching time was during the first Sat Chandi Yajna in 1995 when Sri Swamiji gave his crystal mala and Shivalingam to Swami Niranjan. I cried for hours without knowing why. And not just me, we were all placed there as witnesses. At one point tears started flowing and they would not stop for hours. It was such a touching and such a profound experience that maybe I was crying not just for what I was seeing, perhaps the subconscious and unconscious were being affected as well. I had no idea why I should cry or have tears. It was not just me, many of us. This has happened to me many times after that in Rikhia.

I used to go to just watch him, just to be near him. Sometimes he would say, "Get out! Don't come back!" I was living in Italy and coming to India, seeing him and then going back. I was used to being away from him, not that I saw him every day, knowing that he was just around the corner. So after the mahasamadhi, nothing very much changed, because I never felt him to be physically present or accessible all the time anyway. I do not understand what is this mahasamadhi. I have a limited mind and it is difficult with this limited mind to really see, know and understand. I feel lucky and fortunate in this life to have met such a person and to have had interaction with him.

Definitely the relationship and interaction with Sri Swamiji has something to do with the heart. It is not a mental or logical thing. I tried very hard to understand it but I could not. I am a man born in Africa and I have this strange relationship with this man who is coming from

India, but my entire life and everything is connected with this person. Logically, there is no sense or reason, but at the same time the intensity and the depth of feeling and sentiment . . . it definitely means that there is something. What that something really is I do not know, I only know that I am very grateful to him.

To have the understanding and the feeling that with all my idiosyncrasies, complications, negativities, he had accepted me, he had given me trust and he has proved that many times. He trusted me. He always made me feel a part of everything. Whatever I am today, I owe it to Sri Swamiji. I am grateful to life to have had such a meeting, such an encounter, it is the maximum. There is nothing else that I would consider in life to be complete.



SWAMI SHRADDHAMURTI SARASWATI

Australia

Swami Shraddhamurti was born in Queensland, Australia in 1961 and grew up in Cairns and Weipa in Northern Australia. He met Sri Swami Satyananda in 1979 and spent many years living in Satyananda Yoga ashrams around Australia. Currently he lives in Wagga Wagga, NSW, Australia, and also spends time at Ganga Darshan ashram in Munger.

In 1979, Sri Swami Satyananda had come to Australia. My father was practising yoga and he convinced me into making this trip from the north, where I was living at the time. I was seventeen years old. My impressions from that first visit were two things. One was that when I saw Swami Satyananda come down from the stage and walk through the crowd to leave, I was surprised to notice how small his body was. When he was sitting up there and speaking, he had seemed like a 20-foot giant to me. The second impression was like that phenomenon they call ‘Ball lightning’. That’s what he was like. A ten-foot tall giant ball of lightning! It made a huge impression on my seventeen-year-old mind.

The kind of things that Sri Swamiji spoke about were like an answer to a desperate prayer, like the prayer of a child made from the heart. I was going through a conflict in my life. I knew I did not want to be part of mainstream life, as it was at the time, but in those days the only alternative was to

become a Christian monk and that was definitely not what I wanted to do either.

Seeing Sri Swamiji, hearing him speak and the energy he had, was like a dam being lifted. He spoke about things that he fully and truly believed in. He lived exactly as he wanted. His life was shaped to achieve what he wanted to achieve. I had never seen anybody so sure and so clear. There was no doubt, there were no questions, just total and absolute conviction and the body was this beautiful vehicle in which to travel the path.

That initial inspiration I got from him was the most important thing in my life. It gave my life a direction which was nowhere on the horizon before I met him. The next time he came to Australia, I went to see him and received initiation. I was eighteen by then. The time I took initiation, Sri Swamiji was there for one month. We saw him nearly every day and had satsang with him. I felt that there was no need for me to go to India, the question never came to my mind. He used to give satsangs and guidance, just sit with us, do kirtan. He explained to us how and why it was that we were to teach yoga as our seva, as sannyasins for this tradition, I understood and accepted it more easily.

In 1988, I was in living at one of the centres in Australia and we got the news that Sri Swamiji had left Ganga Darshan. Later, when I heard that he was saying in Rikhia, that he was no longer our guru, that we should not even think about him or send him our petitions because it would disturb his sadhana – that I found very difficult. How could I not think about him? Perhaps It felt like a horrible violence within myself because I wanted to obey him but it was very hard to accept and act on his directive of not even thinking about him!

I came to India in 2001. It was my first trip and I went to Rikhia to see Sri Swamiji. In some ways, he was the same, especially his belly laugh. When he initiated me, he had asked me, “Have you thought very much about taking sannyasa?” and when I said, “No,” he burst out laughing

and his whole belly was shaking – that same laugh was still there. He had changed and in some ways he was more serious and in other ways, he seemed less so. He truly and totally believed in what he was doing – exactly what had inspired me the first time I saw him. It felt like Sri Swamiji was becoming more and more like his natural self. He had this whole different world to show us, not of yoga because until that point yoga was the only thing I knew about, and suddenly there were the yajnas, gods, devi and bhakti . . .

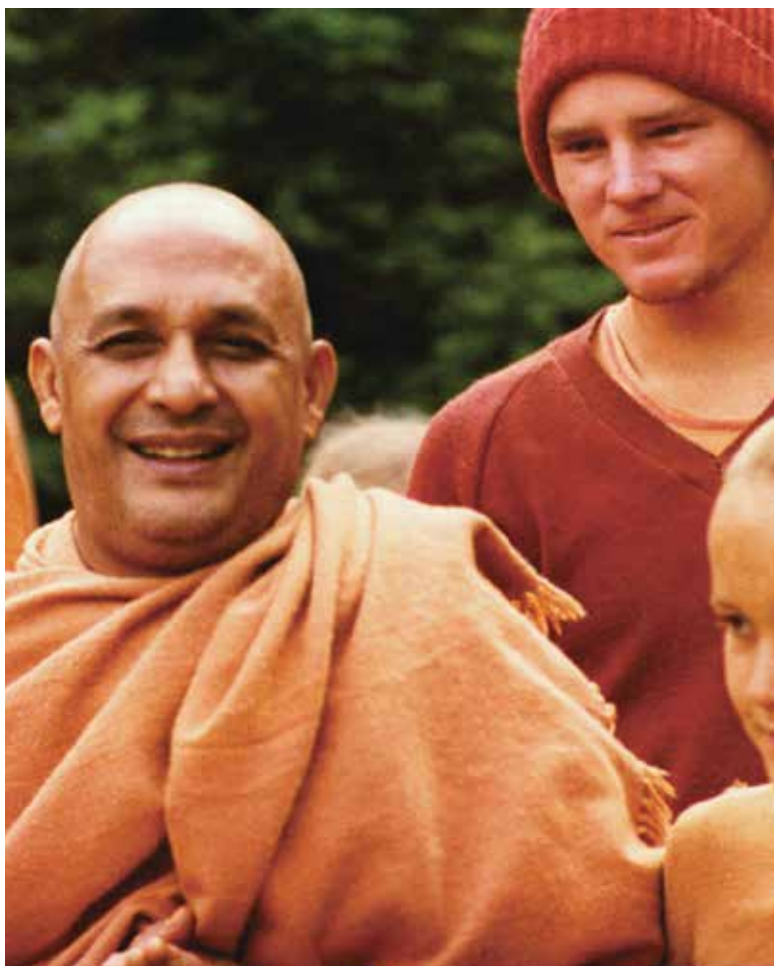
Nevertheless, I owe everything to him because without his appearance in my life in 1979, my life would have been destroyed before it had even begun. So I owe my life to him. He was the foundation of my life. If not for him and his inspiration, I would have been just a confused, embittered, frustrated person, lost and unable to find a way out. He simply lifted me out from that.

In 2009, I was in Australia, living a family life, looking after the children. We heard about the mahasamadhi from our ashram friends. I had a very strong feeling to go to India that year for the yajnas but there was no way I could have made it happen. In a strange kind of way, his not being in the physical body anymore made it easier for me because now I could go back to thinking about him and not be worried about disturbing his sadhana! It freed me from what I felt was my obligation not to interfere or disturb him. I could think about him all the time now. All those restrictions of time and space were lifted and it was like a gift. Subsequent visits to Rikhia since then have been so incredible, to sit at his Samadhi Sthal and feel his presence, feel that joy, that bliss.

When I think about his personality, I feel that he was like a medieval lord or baron. It felt like he would hold court and all sorts of interesting and fantastic things would happen just as they would in the court of a king. Everything would be happening in his presence, around him and because of him. He was so magnanimous, so generous, so big-hearted. It was funny that his physical form was so small because he

had such a massive heart! I was so lucky to have experienced that.

There was that special time in 2003 when I was in Rikhia during the yajnas and he gave darshan to everybody. He sat where he used to and all the 5,000 or more people filed past him, doing pranam and offering their respect. It took hours but he saw each and every one! So generous, like he always was. And still is.



SWAMI BHAJANANANDA SARASWATI

Greece

Swami Bhajananda was born in 1963 in Athens, Greece. She was introduced to Satyananda Yoga in 1981 and was initiated into poorna sannyasa in 1984. She has worked at the Thessaloniki yoga centre till 2000 and is president of the Satyanandashram Greece. She acted as translator for Sri Swamiji, Swami Niranjanananda and Swami Satyasangananda during their visits to Greece and has also assisted in the translation of many BSY books into Greek. Her involvement continues to this day and she performs various duties for the Paiania ashram.

In July 1979, I found myself in a lovely outside garden somewhere by the sea where Swami Sivamurti was giving a talk about Guru Poornima. I knew about yoga and some friends had invited me to this place. I didn't know anything about Guru Poornima but as she was talking, I had a distinct feeling that a real guru was talking through her. I believe that was my first contact with Sri Swami Satyananda.

In May 1980 I first met Swami Satyananda in physical form when he came to Greece. When I asked for initiation, he initiated me into poorna sannyasa, gave me my name and mantra all at once. Of course, my life changed completely after that. I was asked to translate for him in his public lecture. That was the first time that I was doing anything like this. After that I became his translator in Greece whenever he came. While I was translating for him, there was a

togetherness. He followed my every word closely and he even corrected me a few times, even though officially he didn't speak Greek.

My first visit to India was in October 1980 and I had come along with a group brought by Swami Sivamurti. We had an unforgettable stay in the old BSY ashram. Sri Swamiji was there waiting at the gate for us when we arrived. He showed us our rooms and where to go, he was there all the time. He went on to visit Greece eight times until 1985, and during those times he was very approachable. I could speak to him like I would speak to my father. I was a very shy person but I was always asked to take him a cup of tea or something.

I remember once we had organized a conference on health in Salonika for Sri Swamiji. During a break, we were having lunch with him. I had many duties and while I was eating, I was thinking about my duties, what I had to do next. Suddenly out of the blue, Sri Swamiji turned to me and said, "When you eat, you should eat. When you sleep, you should sleep. When you work, you should work." What a beautiful teaching for my whole life.

I recall another instance during the breaks from the conference. At some point, we were just the two of us in his room and he was telling me something. He started saying,



“Now what is important,” and then somebody interrupted, came into the room, spoke with him in Hindi, then the person left. I was looking at him, expecting him to say what was important. He was looking away, as if we had not had that prior conversation. So finally I said, “Swamiji, you were saying ‘What is important,’” and he looked at me and said, “Nothing is important.”

There was a deep connection with Sri Swamiji. After initiation, at some point he appointed me to take care of the centre in Salonika, in the north of Greece. It was a lovely house with a huge garden. I was very young, just in my twenties, and though I lived there alone, never once did I feel insecure. I had to accompany various visiting swamis during their trips to Greece and translate for them. I also had to fly frequently between Salonika and Athens but I had a huge fear of flying. After my initiation, the fear disappeared. He uplifted me. He was very gentle sometimes. Swami Sivamurti had said that if you have a sadhana, you do as soon as you get up in the morning, around 4 o'clock or so. I couldn't get up easily in the morning, so I never had time for my mantra. During one of his visits, Sri Swamiji looked at me very gently and said, “Do your mantra, please.” It was so sweet.

When we heard that he had left Ganga Darshan in 1988, it was a huge surprise. However, because we were living in Greece and we were used to living at a geographical distance from him, in a way there was not that much change. Though Sri Swamiji was saying that he was not our guru anymore, Swami Sivamurti said to us, “Your guru is always your guru. That never changes. These are tests of faith.” Then in 1991, a group of us visited Swami Niranjan in Ganga Darshan and we were accepted to go to Rikhia. We had been told not to ask him any questions. When we saw him, he seemed more withdrawn, more remote but when he asked us a few questions, we realized that he was very aware of us and knew exactly what was happening in our lives.

That time was a period of strengthening the inner contact and communication, a period when we had to

become more responsible for our lives. Though Sri Swamiji was not there to ask little questions even though it used to be just once a year, there was a continuation. After his panchagni sadhana concluded, I noticed that every year he became a little closer to the image of him that I had in the 1980s. To me, he became more like the guru I had known earlier. Maybe this was my personal experience. I felt that he was coming closer to the physical plane for us, he was doing that for us. More approachable, more extrovert, more expressive like when we had met him earlier and I feel that was his gift to us.

I was in Greece during his mahasamadhi. It was early on a Sunday morning that the phone was ringing and ringing. I thought, 'Sunday morning, who is ringing?' Eventually I found a message on my mobile. It said something along these lines – 'Sri Swamiji has entered mahasamadhi. Please inform all those who knew him and loved him. The world will never be the same without him'. I couldn't register this in the beginning, I couldn't really grasp it. I jumped up. I went to his photograph, said the *Mahamrityunjaya* mantra. I prayed to him, 'Please give me a message'. I had a pack of cards with different messages printed and I drew one card which said, 'Now I am free from the limitations of the physical body. I am happy, I am flying to other planes'. I felt such a relief and that, 'There he is, he is answering me'. In the ashram we chanted the *Mahamrityunjaya* mantra. A few days later, it was our turn to go. At the airport, I felt so heavy. Every time my heart was full of joy because we were going to meet him and this time I was coming to participate in his last rites.

When we arrived in Rikhia, the experience was totally different. It was a completely uplifting experience. Of course, the tears were there, the grief came out but it was uplifting. His energy was everywhere. It was completely illogical. He was present, I could feel him. After that time, you thought about him and he was instantly there. I think it has been a common experience for many. The relationship continues.

It is a continuation. He had trained us very systematically in long-distance contact.

He used to say, “The best relationship is when you are in your room and I am in my room and we contact each other.” In 1988, when he left Ganga Darshan, he said, “Do not even think about me.” That was not possible, of course, but the long-distance relationship was being cultivated. Anyway, coming from Greece, we had that. He gave us the gift of Swami Niranjan so that we could also have the physical contact with guru. The inner connection is something one always is working on and it is an inner learning process, it is an inner training and he is there.

He is there whenever things flow harmoniously, when you have been thinking correctly, you have been acting in the right direction and things flow. In that external harmony of things happening just as they should be happening, he is there. He is also there when you are feeling an inner disturbance because you are caught up in some kind of negativity, he is there in that inner disturbance, directing you and he is there when you talk to him.

He is the continuing inspiration of one’s life and he is there in his disciples, he is there for us in his disciples, in Swami Niranjan and Swami Satsangi and Swami Sivamurti, and in many disciples. Thank you, Sri Swamiji.



SWAMI KAILASH SARASWATI

New Zealand

Swami Kailash was born in 1961 in New Zealand. He met Sri Swami Satyananda in 1980 and received mantra diksha at that time. In 1983, he was initiated into poorna sannyasa by Sri Swamiji in Australia. He spends his time between New Zealand and the Munger and Rikhia ashrams in India.

My first experience with yoga was when I was about eight when my mother took me to yoga classes because I had asthma. I realized later that it had been Satyananda Yoga. One of Sri Swamiji's disciples, Roma Blair, had started the IYTA and had become quite widespread in New Zealand. That was really my introduction to yoga and Sri Swamiji.

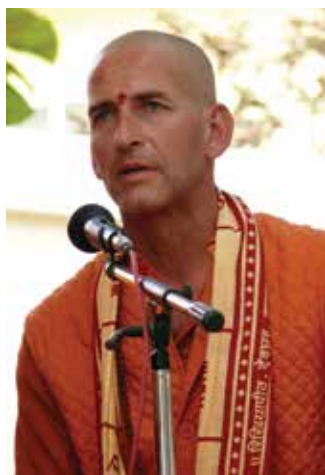
I first met him in 1980 when I was nineteen. I was trying to find something substantial in life and my options were either the Air Force or ashram. I met somebody in Perth and when I asked him where he was living, he said in a yoga centre. I went to visit him just on impulse the next day. I had no idea about ashram or anything and I had a wonderful time with the swamis living there. I had some understanding of what they were trying to do with their lives and it was really heartening. The next thing on the calendar, in November and December 1980 was a trip to the east of Australia by bus. So about 25, 30 people went from Perth to Sydney, then to Mangrove Mountain and there was Sri Swamiji.

In the preceding period of about three months, I had seen pictures of him but he was a myth at that stage. There were thousands and the sadhana room was a huge area. There was a kriya course and that was the first appearance of Sri Swamiji for me. The atmosphere was interesting because he was sitting there and looking so comfortable, as comfortable as anyone can be in themselves, and it was reflected in the people as well. There was a silence or soft murmuring and a sense of communion or something of the sort. It was as if people's minds had stopped. I had a place on the floor from where I could see him directly. My first impressions were just an idea, 'Finally, here was somebody whom I could ask anything and he would give me the answer, he knew the reality'. When he started speaking it was without prejudice, bias or agenda except to share the truth. That really was the main thing for me. When he spoke, it seemed so personal. He spoke on a range of subjects; it seemed like he was speaking about everything. Whatever he said was just the truth, as things are, and he spoke with such an extreme confidence that the people felt that this was what was in front



of them. He was there to share and had a sense of completeness to it all. I was entranced.

It wasn't a feeling of a personal relationship then but more like he was the archetypal patron. There was something very fatherly about him, and in fact in many ways he was also like my father, and those qualities that we might wish for or expect in the father, he had in abundance. That's what I felt he expressed. I had little or no idea



what sannyasa or yoga was about and it didn't matter. The association with him, that was important. If he was teaching something else, not yoga, that would have been fine as well. Subsequently in 1983, I asked for initiation, which he gave me, into sannyasa and I didn't even know what that was! It was years later that I realized, on reflection, that it wasn't the same thing as yoga. That was of no consequence either because it was the association with him that mattered to me. In April 1983, he was back in Australia I was living in an ashram at a remote place the other end of the island of New Zealand.

I saw him again in 1984 when he came to New Zealand. I had the privilege of driving him, a teenage driver, from his hotel to the centre and then down to the south of Auckland to the property where the ashram was. He gave one satsang at the Auckland Museum and a few satsangs at the ashram, a place called Lake Fonderbay, where my parents came and met him. It was lovely. My father is an Anglican priest and after meeting Swami Satyananda, he quoted him several times in sermons that I happened to be present in. After that I didn't see Sri Swamiji for many years.

I started going to India in 1993 and that was the first time I met Swami Niranjana at Ganga Darshan. I did not

meet Sri Swamiji until 1995, when I went to Rikhia with my brother, Nataraj. He had developed an association with Sri Swamiji earlier than I but quite independently. We had no idea but we compared notes after realizing this.

In 1995 was the first Sat Chandi and it had been eleven years since I had last seen him but it seemed like a lifetime. He looked different, fiery-eyed and ferocious. He had aged and he was also in the middle of his panchagni sadhana. He had a fierce vitality at the time and yet it felt like he had not left me, I had not left him, there was no separation at all. It triggered all the same, familiar things within me so any sense or thoughts that I might have had of separation instantly dissolved. On reflection and on seeing the videos of that time when Sri Swamiji passed on his crystal lingam and mala to Swami Niranjan, they were like a series of snapshots in my mind. I was there when it happened. Again, I did not know the import of these things but it felt like a big event and so apt.

In 1996 I was really fortunate because I got permission to visit Rikhia for a couple of weeks in June and there was almost nobody there. It was such a rarefied atmosphere and seemed such a privilege. There may have been a dozen people living there at the most and it was very basic living yet it was magic. On several occasions, working with some of the people doing mostly manual karma yoga, there would be a sudden change in the atmosphere. I can only surmise that he intended that effect because there was always the feeling that his consciousness pervaded everything.

In whatever state your mind was, the thoughts were polarized with his and it was his atmosphere. There used to be a sudden feeling of physical and mental bliss, as if all those sensations dissolved into something very subtle, the mind went blank and expanded. Looking around at the others, they also seemed to confirm that this was truly happening. A silence, no sounds at first giving way to subtler sounds, like a high-pitched vibration that it seemed to go on for so long, but the effects certainly endured

for even longer. It felt distinctly like a blessing, as if he intended it. It was just magic, everything was brilliant, more than real, surreal and suddenly the awareness was expanded, it was something magical and unique. It felt like it was his gift to us.

In 2009, I had been living in Rikhia for about two years. I had intended to come and live within the immediate sphere of Sri Swamiji and fortunately it became possible for me to do that. When I first went to live in Rikhia at the end of 2007, I was given the job of photography. A camera was thrust into my hands, I never really used a digital SLR before, and I was to cover Sri Swamiji's satsangs and also video them. Sometimes he would hold private satsangs with a few people, sometimes it was public and generally in Ganesh Kutir. While I was taking photographs, I was constantly looking at him through the lens and seeing the many faces of Sri Swamiji.

He seemed different then, somehow more consolidated, perhaps because he wasn't so physically active. It was just so wonderful to see him like that, such a complete human being, relating with so many people. And he always laughed. There was always a rarefied atmosphere, the awareness was high and every little thing that was said had significance. And his face: sometimes he looked so youthful, sometimes he looked ancient and the next time he might be very different again.



It was fascinating. For me, it filled a gap that I had in my relationship with him. I was also given the task of making an inventory of all the old recordings and video tapes so I ‘saw’ him a lot!

At the time of his mahasamadhi, I was in Amrit Kalash and I hadn’t slept particularly well. I was awakened by a call from Mantrabindu, a theatrical whisper from two floors down, “Kailash! Come down.” I went downstairs wearing a singlet and a dhoti which was to be my attire for the rest of the day, I was stuck in it. Some of us odd karma yogis gathered at Parna Kutir. Nothing was said, there were not a lot of people and we were going to dig a big hole there. There were shovels, we had marked it out and then we started smashing the concrete, through the bricks and into the earth.

So that was from 2.30 in the morning. Nothing was explained. The mind was full of scenarios and ideas, some of them way off the mark. It was quite obvious what we were building but I thought that Sri Swamiji was going to require something like the underground meditation chamber in the old BSY ashram down in Munger. The atmosphere did not reflect what people’s minds were imagining. Finally, I had to simply ask Mantrabindu and he said, “Swamiji is at peace.” So we kept digging and everyone was not joyful, but their spirits were high. As if something had been released, some sort of benevolent bomb, the atmosphere was infused with it. There was nothing to think of, the mind was just put aside.

I saw Sri Swamiji when he came out on the palanquin from Tulsi Kutir, through the gate from Gauri Ganesh and went to Ganesh Kutir. He was sitting cross-legged in the palanquin as if he was doing the rounds of all his significant points. Then he was brought towards Parna Kutir. At one stage there were a lot of pandits chanting and doing pooja. Swami Niranjan and Swami Satsangi placed him in the pit. Then the earth started to be put around with salt and charcoal and for some time we watched the level of the earth

rising. Swami Niranjan and Swami Satsangi were placing the earth, later other people were also given the opportunity to put in the earth around him.

It was an absolutely wonderful day, such heightened energy, there was no shortage of endurance or prana in anyone, so much had to be done and there was all of this work that did get done. It was a unique and historic event, once in a lifetime or several lifetimes. There was no demonstration of personal loss but there was a feeling of elation and wonderment, such a historic occasion to witness a human being reach such a state. I think I don't know how lucky I am.

Sri Swami Satyananda is the inspiration of my life. I feel that the guru tattwa is present in him and Swami Niranjan. I do not discriminate between Sri Swamiji and Swami Niranjan.



AJANTA NEBHWANI

Spain

Ajanta Nebhwani (Sannyasi Prajnashakti) was born in 1959 in New Delhi India. She received karma sannyasa diksha in 1994 and lives in Barcelona, Spain. Her contribution to Satyananda Yoga has been in the field of teaching, writing and publishing a monthly magazine in Spanish which has a wide circulation.

I first met Sri Swamiji in 1981 in Paris. I had studied and been brought up in India and our household was a rational, intellectual household. Full of love, but we had dispensed with some traditions so I had no idea about sannyasis, sadhus and such things. I was studying in Paris and a friend of mine insisted that I meet his guru, who travelled often to Europe. I kept putting it off and I said, “No, I am really not interested.” He really wanted me to meet his guru, Swami Satyananda, and so I finally agreed. We went to Charles de Gaulle airport where Sri Swamiji was in transit for a few hours.

I was eighteen, very conscious of myself, of France and all its fashion. While we were waiting for him to come out of the arrival gate, I saw a very regal-looking Indian monk coming out. I looked for my friend but I couldn’t find him. Then I saw him lying absolutely flat on the airport floor. I had no idea what he was doing. I was so embarrassed. Of course, all the Parisians were looking on and though they were trying not to make too much of a scene, they were shocked at what was going on: a young man was rushing to touch this monk’s

feet. So that was my first experience with Sri Swamiji. At that point I thought that as soon as we leave the airport, I will never see this friend of mine again. Things did not turn out like that, for he became my husband! And that is how my association with Sri Swamiji began.

I met him often after that. He would come to Paris, I would go to his retreats, seminars, workshops in Europe. I have to say I wasn't a devotional person; I was simply overwrought by this person. I had never seen anybody like Sri Swamiji before. I was so surprised to see someone who had absolutely nothing, yet completely overjoyed with all aspects of his life. I was always surrounded by people who had everything but they always wanted more and were never satisfied, and there was no joy in life. There was momentary joy, but there was always something else that one needed. Here was someone who had absolutely nothing, and he was so joyous. He had no judgment, he had no criticism, he accepted everybody at face value. There was no creed, there was no caste, nothing. It was amazing. I had never seen anything like that or anybody like that.

In 1985, when he was in Greece during Guru Poornima, we had gone there. I wasn't too sure what Guru Poornima was, I wasn't too sure what we were supposed to do there. There was this long line of people waiting in front of



him with presents in their hands. Since we were in the countryside, I picked a few flowers from around me, made a little pretty bunch and I was wondering, 'What am I doing here? But anyway, here I am'. When I came in front of him, I offered him the flowers and he took them as sweetly as ever and whispered something in my ear. I had no idea what it was, why he had said that. When I came out, I asked some friends, "He said this to me, and what does it mean?" They said, "Oh, he's given you mantra diksha!" I said, "What's mantra diksha?" That is how a relationship was forged, a yogic relationship. I became his disciple without knowing it. I found a guru without having even looked for one. It is so true that the guru finds you, at least my experience has been that the guru always finds you.

I got married and I brought my elder son to Munger when he was one and a half years old. I brought him every year after that and then the younger one came. Both of them came every year for their holidays and they loved it every moment of it. It was very hot, the food was simple, there were difficulties but they never complained once. Our special treat was when Swami Niranjan would take us to Rikhia with him to meet Sri Swamiji. Those times were the most special ones, Sri Swamiji was still doing his panchagni. It was just us – Sri Swamiji, Swami Satsangi and Swami Niranjan, and Bholenath, of course, my boys and I. These sessions with him were lovely.

When I got married he told me, "Don't stay at home. Make sure you work. Don't become a housewife, don't become just a homemaker. Do something. Your father spent so much money on your education, it is not enough to just sit at home and do nothing." Every time I would meet him, he would say, "*Kya kar rahe ho?* Are you working?" I would say, "Yeah, Swamiji, I am learning Spanish." I would have some excuse or the other because I was lazy. I was happy just being at home, looking after my children. He would say, "No, it is not enough to be a mother. You have to work, you have to work." I have to say, I was not really doing

yoga or studying yoga. One day, I have no idea how, I said, “Swamiji, can I teach yoga?” He looked at me, and I think he was more surprised than I was. He said, “Yes,” and I was, of course, even more nervous than ever because I had asked for something which I had no idea at all about. Then that part of my life started where I had to learn yoga to be able to teach it. I was very hesitant but Swami Niranjan said, “You have the permission so you must start. Now that you have asked for it, that’s it.”

Sri Swamiji has been an integral part of our lives. There are absolutely no words to describe him. Nothing at all. There exists no language to describe what he is. Even if one says that he is love embodied, who walked once with us, it’s not enough. I would say he is, what the Upanishads say, *Neti, Neti*: not this, not this.



SWAMI AGNIHOTRI SARASWATI

USA

Swami Agnihotri was born in 1935 in New York City, USA. Though he had been practising yoga since 1960, the search for a guru led him to Munger where he met Sri Swamiji in 1981. He stayed for six months, participating in courses and immersed himself in ashram life. Since that time, he has returned to the ashram almost every year for at least two months at a time. He was initiated into poorna sannyasa by Sri Swamiji on Sivaratri, 1988. Contributing significantly to the mission of yoga in a variety of ways, he was also instrumental in initiating the Conversations project in Ganga Darshan. Since 2009, he has offered his support through the North American Gurukul. Currently he lives in London and Bangkok.

After finishing college at Princeton, USA, I went to study in Italy for two years. I was to return to the US but decided to visit India instead and spent 1959 at Kaivalyadham Yoga Institute in Lonavala. I was about 25 at the time. When I returned to the US, my father asked me what I was going to do with myself. Well, whatever it was to be, I was sure that it would have to be 'something different'. I went to live for some time with my godfather, who was an important financier in New York City. Nothing in particular caught my fancy but I met a lot of very interesting people. One of them was Monsieur Noel Monod who was the treasurer of the United Nations. His brother-in-law was the French ambassador to Algeria and through him, I got to know about



a charity organization called the Church World Service. I went to an interview with them and landed a job in their Algeria mission. I was there for four years and had continued with the yoga sadhana I had learnt at Kaivalyadham.

I took a year's sabbatical and came to India again. I visited many famous and not-so-famous gurus but I was not impressed in the least with anything or anyone I saw. Somehow I landed up in Rishikesh and went to the Divine Life Society. I remember fervently praying at Swami Sivananda's Samadhi, begging him to help me find my guru. Soon after that, I went to Nepal and attended a yoga class given by a swami which impressed me a great deal. When I asked him where he had learned this kind of yoga, he said that he was from Bihar School of Yoga. At the time, I had never heard of Sri Swami Satyananda. I came to Munger in 1984.

Though the ashram activities were very much centered around the old BSY ashram, I was accommodated at Ganga Darshan which was really a construction site at the time. I was the only person living there and every morning I used

to collect cabbages from the gardens before heading down to BSY. In those days, I had no idea about karma yoga because at Kaivalyadham things were run quite differently than how they were in BSY. Anyway, I would go off to buy vegetables with Sri Swamiji and then we would all sit together in a big circle to chop vegetables for the kitchen. I also used to work in construction at Ganga Darshan, carrying heavy stones and things like that.

I had received my name and mantra from Sri Swamiji but there was no real relationship as such until one day when I was carrying some heavy stones, he walked past and enquired about how my Hindi lessons were coming along. I almost dropped what I was carrying! I had been living alone at Ganga Darshan and used to listen to tapes in my room at night to learn Hindi but I had not told anyone about it. That's when I had an inkling about how he knew pretty much everything about everyone. Soon after that, there was talk about a kriya course to be held for one of the groups that different swamis would bring out from Europe. Well, I knew nothing about kriya yoga and decided to sign up. It was wonderful. It blew my mind and I continued with the practices for quite some time.

My work with the Church World Service carried on and I had assignments in many different countries like Zaire, Madagascar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Burma, India and Haiti. At most places, I was posted for four years at a time but since I had long vacations, I always returned to BSY for almost two to three months each year.

In those days, when you arrived at the ashram you always went to meet Sri Swamiji the next morning in Kutir. It was very nice. He used to check my malas to see if they were getting worn out! He also met you before you left. That meant a lot to me. He really inspired me and it was his love. I had some trouble with asthma at one point. I didn't have this problem as a child or anything. It came up much later after I started with yoga. He took a lot of interest and personal care in teaching me the practices. We used to

do that in the kitchen building, Annapoorna Bhavan. We used to do kunjil outside there as well. He helped me get through the asthma attacks and even used to give me coffee sometimes! He was such a gentleman. Always so thoughtful, considerate and generous in abundance.

One of the sannyasins would always be talking to me about taking sannyasa, year after year. Well, I was not interested in shaving my head or giving up my life and living in the ashram for 12 years or anything. One day I asked Sri Swamiji if taking sannyasa meant having to do all that and he said, “No, you don’t have to do any of that.” On Sivaratri of 1988, along with seven others, I was initiated into poorna sannyasa and became Swami Agnihotri.

When Sri Swamiji left Ganga Darshan in 1988, it did not make much difference to me because I was not living at the ashram all the time. I felt happy that he was off on the next part of his journey, doing what he had wanted to do. Later, when we would go to Rikhia, it was wonderful to see him and the relationship continued. One time, I was walking about in the evening and it was quite dark. I bumped into Sri Swamiji and he said, “Agnihotri, what are you doing here?” The next morning, there was satsang with him and I was the first one in the queue because I was leaving that day.

In that satsang he spoke a lot about the use of garlic, how it was very good for prostrate problems, the benefits and so on and he was talking directly to me. I felt like I was the star of that satsang. Later, as it happens, I developed problems with my prostrate and had to have it removed.



Of course, I took a lot of garlic at that time. It was clear to me then that he had seen it coming and was giving me an advance warning of sorts. After the surgery, the doctors declared that I was lucky to be alive. I knew that this was thanks to the special darshan which I had with Sri Swamiji.

The last time I saw Sri Swamiji was at the Sat Chandi Yajna in 2008. He enquired about my health and said, “Don’t worry about anything for I shall be looking after you.” In 2009, I was in Hanoi when I heard about his mahasamadhi. I was unable to come for the ceremonies and though I was sad that he was not on the physical plane anymore, I was not devastated. I felt awe and amazement at the wonderful way in which he had left his body. Now that he has left the mortal coil, I feel that the last thing that he told me is even more true. In fact, I believe that he is looking after each and every one of us.



SWAMI NIRMALRATNA SARASWATI

Australia

Swami Nirmalratna was born in 1955 in Maitland, Australia. She first met Sri Swamiji in 1981 and received poorna sannyasa in 1983. A resident in Ganga Darshan and Rikhia since 1988, she has contributed her seva in several areas including construction, accounts and teaching English to the kanyas in Rikhia. Her seva in Ganga Darshan has been in various departments: construction, maintenance, book compilation, teaching, administrative coordination and library.

I came to India in 1988 to live in Ganga Darshan with the thought that I was coming here to live with my guru but two months after I had arrived, Sri Swamiji left Ganga Darshan. During those years, 1988 to 1990, we did not know if we would be meeting with Sri Swamiji again. In the beginning of 1990, the residents of Ganga Darshan went to meet him at the property which is now the Akhara in Rikhia. He sat there before us all and said very clearly, “I am no longer your guru; do not send me any of your emotions, any of your thoughts, cut all your connection with me.” I sat in front of him and thought, ‘Well, unfortunately you have already told me: one guru, one mantra and one God’, and so I held fast to that. Throughout the years from 1990 until 1992, I had the hope that I would still go to live with my guru.

In the beginning of 1992 I was called to Rikhia. In those days there were only a few buildings, a gatehouse and a residence on either side. The day that I sat before Sri

Swamiji in Rikhia, he was wearing a langoti, he had grown his hair and he was sitting with his elbow on his yoga danda, his eyes closed. I was most fortunate to be experiencing this scene alone because at that time virtually no one was allowed into Rikhia. People would come to the gate and be turned away. They would come from all over India and overseas swamis and long-time devotees would come to visit their guru yet they were denied entry. People were told that Sri Swamiji was practising high sadhanas and he was in isolation. I knew that every moment of my time there was not to be taken for granted. As I sat before him that day, a question came to my mind and I thought, 'Well, now is my chance to ask him'. It is a question that I had wanted an answer to, not just from a thought or a dream, but I wanted it in a nice, strong, clear voice.

After about nine years of sannyasa life, the question I put to him was, "Swamiji, what do I do with my life? Where do I go? How long do I spend in an ashram? I have seen many beggars, many people in need, living on the streets, in Australia, in New Zealand, in Italy, in America, in India itself. All these people are in need. What do I do with my life? I am also in need." I immediately went back to my room and wrote his answer in my diary. Every now and then, I pull out that diary and I re-read those words.

He said, "You must learn, you must understand, and you must see what it is that people need to take them out of their misery. You must be compassionate, you must be caring and giving. Buddha, Jesus, Mahavir, Zoroaster, all of these great saints are well known because they were compassionate, caring and giving. You are not to increase your sadhana, continue with the small sadhana that you are doing and that sadhana will become very fruitful, if alongside it you are able to be caring, giving and compassionate. Spiritual sadhana, spiritual life, religious life, without compassion is empty, it is nothing and it is useless.

Your sadhana now is *mitrasadhana*, being a friend to all; knowing what people need to take them out of their

misery. To do that, you must have a very open mind, you must consider the whole world as your neighbour, every person must become your friend. Live here and work with the attitude of *nishkama*, selflessness, and give everything of yourself to the work, give everything of yourself, your love, your time, your energy, your money, all your frustrations, all your hatred, all your jealousies, everything you give to the work and you will get that back in your meditation practice.” This was the great Sri Swami Satyananda speaking: the very same Swami Satyananda who had built his guru’s ashram, established Bihar School of Yoga, and was now in the process of undergoing higher sadhanas in Rikhia. He was saying to me, “What a fool I was to think that I had done all this, it was God who was behind it all.”

With those introductory words, I went into my life in Rikhia and it was an extremely difficult time. We would get up no later than three in the morning and start work, cleaning, making breakfast on a very small fire. There were about seven of us living there at that time but I think the work there was enough for one hundred and seven. It was the very beginnings of things, before the Prasad Kutir, the clinic, the kanyas, the housing construction in the villages, much before any of that had started.



Those early days of the projects that Sri Swamiji had started up were not only hard work but they were very inspiring work. The work he was doing was in direct relation to a mandate that he had recently been given while he was doing his panchagni sadhana. He was given a mandate from God, to serve his neighbours as God had served him. This service came about as prasad. The first time I glanced into the newly rebuilt small room of the first Prasad Kutir and saw someone sitting amongst piles of clothing. I asked, "What is this?" and the person said, "Oh, we have just received a truckload of suitcases of second-hand clothing. It is all wet." It was the middle of monsoon and I quickly moved on to thinking, 'Oh my God, that's a lot of work'. Just a few minutes later Sri Swamiji called me and he said, "Nirmal, I am putting you in charge of Prasad Kutir. If we find that you are too busy to attend to this duty along with everything else you are doing, we can depute someone from Munger." Anyway, after eight years of seva in Prasad Kutir, I came to realize that it was one of the greatest sadhanas I had ever been given.

One of the first distributions I had to make went like this: Sri Swamiji said, "Today we are calling a village woman, Mrs Jha, and we're going to give her some prasad. Have a look in the prasad box and see what we can give her." At that time, it was one small cardboard box. I looked in and there was an old sari, an old sari blouse and a new sari with a new sari blouse. He said, "She is from one of the villages, what do you think we would give her?" I had absolutely no idea so I took a guess and said, "Swamiji, she is a village woman, we could give her this old sari, this used sari blouse." He said, "I will teach you everything. What you need to learn is that prasad needs to be given according to the person's need. Now this woman, although she lives in a village, is from one of the higher status families in the village. Prasad needs to be given accordingly." That was the very first distribution that I had been involved with in Prasad Kutir.

It was also the beginning of the Clinic. There were five small piles of physician's samples which people get from the

various drug companies. Sri Swamiji called me and said, “Classify these medications according the different systems in the body: digestive, respiratory, circulatory. Make a list of all the medications and make some columns so that we can write the name of the recipient.” I did that and the system was that any of the village people requiring medication would come to the Akhara and I would select something. I am not a doctor but I am under the guidance of Sri Swamiji so I have every confidence. I would select the medication; send it to Sri Swamiji with a list of the symptoms which the village person had; he would either recommend it or suggest I find something else. It would be given to the village person, they would go to the compounder, who would give them instructions of how to use the medication, if it was appropriate. They would come back, we would fully register all the details and then they would go away.



The construction work started on Basant Panchami of 1992. After beginning the small brick, plaster and cement covering over Kali just across from the Sukhman Marhi wall, we went into a nearby village, Loria where we had a grand ceremony with a huge *kudal*, a pickaxe. After breaking the coconut and allowing the water to fall on the gate, on the pickaxe, and onto the ground, and with some kumkum, a small pooja was offered. The first foundations were dug for



the labourer, who was to be the recipient of a low-cost house. The ashram was offering this as prasad from the panchagni sadhana that Sri Swamiji was undertaking at that time. The person whom we were building the house for became the supervisor.

Like this, all the recipients were being paid to supervise and to help with the construction work. They were learning construction, they were learning how to become responsible, they were learning to have faith and to have trust that this new sadhu who had come into their area was there to not only practise his own

sadhana, but to uplift the community within which he was living. During my initiation in 1983 Sri Swamiji had said, “Your own spiritual evolution and that of the community are of equal importance.” He demonstrated that throughout his entire life and always encouraged us as aspiring sannyasins to take up that idea as we take up our own sadhanas, our own practices, our own karma yoga. It is in direct relationship to the needs of the community in which we live.

The first kanya who came to the ashram was a small girl, about eleven years old. She had come as the representative of her family which was to receive a cow. The family member would come every morning and every evening to learn how to care for the cow. Sri Swamiji was not just giving out this prasad, he was giving it in a very proper way. Village people were very poor as far as material possessions go. He did not want to give them things, he wanted them to know how to care for these things, he wanted them to become more

organized. With this intention, he introduced the idea of training the people who were to receive the cows. So this small girl called Ruby presented herself at the office one day. She walked in, looked Swami Satsangi straight in the eye and said, "I have come to receive the training on behalf of my family so that we can receive the cow as prasad." I remember being surprised at this young girl's confidence. Usually village girls were very shy and softly spoken, if they spoke at all.

Here was a young girl in whom Sri Swamiji saw great talent. So this young girl also came to the first class that I was to give in English. The night before she came Sri Swamiji asked me, "How are you going to introduce English to this young girl?" I told him my ideas, and he said, "Well, you will know better than me." I wondered what that meant. "But when you start to teach the sounds of English to her, make sure that you start with the vowels. Make sure that you are not just going to give her the alphabet. You need to start in a proper way." That young girl, Ruby, came every single morning for almost two and a half years. She was the first girl in what has now grown to something like two thousand kanyas in Rikhia. She was clever and could remember very well what I taught her. I became known as a very good English teacher but it was actually her qualities that gave me that label. That was another one of Sri Swamiji's features. He would pick up on any talent, on any special quality that a person had and help them to uplift themselves.



Sri Swamiji was a man of detail. I remember him coming up to a gate that one of the labourers was painting with enamel paint. He stood beside me and said, “Look at how he is putting the paint on that door. You have to ensure that he doesn’t leave any drips of paint on the door. If the drips are left there and they dry, you will not be able to remove them, no matter how many coats of paint you put afterwards.” To this day I ensure that there are no drips on any of the painting work that I may have to supervise. He would even reach out and turn down a tap that was flowing too fast. He came one day to a small residence and it was windy season, there was a small ledge on the window. He ran his finger along the window indicating that there was a lot of dust there. “Who lives here? Tell that person to clean properly.”

The opportunity to live with one’s guru is a chance of a lifetime. You cannot receive those experiences in any other place. The teachings that they give cannot become just stories to tell, they actually have to be implemented in our lives. We have to take up those teachings and make them come true and real in our life.



SWAMI VEDANANDA SARASWATI

Germany

Swami Vedananda was born in 1955 in Gechingen, Germany. He was introduced to Satyananda Yoga in 1981 at the Raipur ashram which he visited during his travels in India. About a month later, he met Swami Satyananda Saraswati and received mantra diksha from him. While travelling around Australia, he stayed at the Perth ashram before returning to Germany. He received karma sannyasa at the Greek ashram in 1985 and in 1988 he came to Munger and was initiated into poorna sannyasa by Sri Swamiji. In November 1990, he went to live in Rikhia and was involved in the early development of the ashram. He lived there for sixteen years and contributed in almost every area of work. Currently he lives in Germany and visits Munger and Rikhia ashrams regularly,

In 1981, I was travelling in India. I had seen pictures of Indian yogis sitting in lotus pose and I was looking for a place to learn yoga, to know what yoga is all about. A lady in Bangalore told me about the Raipur ashram and asked me to go there. I went to Raipur and after one month, they said that their Swamiji would come and that there might not be so much time for me. I stayed and practised hatha yoga from 4 o'clock to 7 o'clock, that was the yoga I thought was yoga. I also had to do karma yoga in the heat, which I did not understand at all but I did it. I was eating vegetarian food. At that time, I was eating 90% meat and a little bit of salad and now only vegetarian. As I read *Meditations from the Tantras*,

many questions which I felt were inside me were answered, which had not even consciously come up. I was asking, 'What is happening?'

Sri Swamiji came for a five-day seminar in the ashram. That was electric. It was the first time I had met a guru. His presence was very big though he was not tall. I heard him talk and all through the seminar I was around him. I heard every satsang. I was also asking questions. My first question was, "What is devotion? I don't understand what is devotion." He explained to me very nicely, "Devotion is something where you have to express your feelings. You can express it to anybody, to your girlfriend or to anybody, to some god – towards yourself is a little dangerous – and to guru." It made an impression on me and I stayed for another month, practising yoga. After that, for one and a half years, I continued travelling but every morning I was doing my practice. That was the first time I met Sri Swamiji.

After travelling in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, I went via Thailand and Singapore to Australia. That was in 1981. There were more than 30 Satyananda Yoga ashrams all over Australia and I had the address of the Perth ashram. That was the next changing point in my life because there I could live yoga and even live my normal life. I was working, I had a girlfriend and I was sincerely practising yoga in the mornings. I could live my nature as it was, nothing dogmatic. I thought that I wanted to live this. I was travelling across Australia and every time I came across a place where there was a Satyananda Yoga ashram, I popped in. I knew that if I wanted to stay in an ashram, I would go to Munger, to the source.

After two years of travelling, I returned to Germany and I met Sri Swamiji in Europe, in Paris and in Greece, in 1984 and 1985. In Raipur, I had received mantra diksha. In Greece, I got my name and I liked it. I did not know what it meant but I liked it anyway. Sri Swamiji is my guru and I wanted to know how a guru lived. I wanted to see the day-to-day life of a guru. Is he only talking or is he living what



he is talking? It took nearly one and a half years to sell my business. In February 1988, I arrived in Munger. I did not see Sri Swamiji much, very rarely. It was all new and exciting. I was fully dedicated to being here from the beginning. I was learning to read and write Hindi otherwise I could not attend the courses Sri Swamiji was giving at the time. It was a very inspiring time.

Then came Guru Poornima 1988. This was the most inspiring Guru Poornima I had. My seva was audio, with microphones and recording. I was sitting down and Sri Swamiji was up on the stage, I was there all the time. One nice experience was this. The morning program started at 4 o'clock so I went a bit earlier, quarter to four. Sri Swamiji was already sitting there. I think it was a three-day program. The next day I came half an hour early and Sri Swamiji was there already. So next day I thought, 'I will go really early, shortly past three' and when I came in, everything was closed. I got the key somehow and Sri Swamiji was still there before I got in! This was on the second floor sadhana hall. He was sitting on the stage, all by himself. I was doing the sound recording and somebody was doing the filming. He was talking 80% in Hindi and I thought, 'I really want to learn

Hindi. I want to know exactly what he is talking about'. To understand what he is telling the Indian people and what he is telling the western people. Is there a difference or is there no difference? I wanted to understand everything.

That was my inspiration and it finally happened many years later. I went to Italy in 2000 and did some editing of video tapes with Swami Anandananda. I came across the tapes of Guru Poornima 1988! I was listening to them so many years later and I could understand everything! It was amazing because he talked to western people in a way that they would understand and a little bit different to the Indian people but basically embracing both cultures. That was an amazing Guru Poornima experience in 1988. It was special, and then a few days later, he was gone.

I thought, 'Oh God! I have come here and he has gone'. Nobody knew what was going on. Some said that he had gone travelling for one month or two months. Slowly, slowly it came through that he might not come back anymore. Many people left at that time. I think only 7 or 8 western people were there and altogether maybe about 20 or 30 people. I was interested in seeing how this place would develop. Then slowly we heard that Sri Swamiji had found a place in Rikhia where he settled. I had thought I would never see him again because they said he is gone and that is that but I stayed on. At some stage we were told that we were going to Bheem Bandh, to the hot springs, for a day trip, however, we ended up in Rikhia. We got out and there he was sitting in a tent. He said, "Welcome! Sit down. Now you have had your darshan so you can go." In five or ten minutes, he said that we could go, "Have food over there and then you go." That was it. For me that was something.

Then there was an announcement about a sannyasa training course in Munger but only for Indian people. If overseas people wanted to stay, they would be sent to different ashrams around India. I was prepared for that and then one day, I was told by a person in the office with a stern face, "You have to go to Rikhia for one year for the time of

the course.” I was sent there and we were only five people with Sri Swamiji. I had the experience I had come for – to see Sri Swamiji in his day-to-day life. In the first half year, we even had lunch and dinner together. You know what Rikhia is today but at that time we were five people and almost nothing else. There was an old building, the Akhara and Sukhman side, that’s all. I saw a place growing into what it is now.

In those days in Rikhia, we did a lot of stupid things. One time, some very high government official was supposed to come but the train was late and coming only after 8 o’clock. I was at the gate in Sukhman Marhi where I always stayed. I had all the instructions about the arrival and accommodation and everything. I went into my room; it must have been about 7 o’clock or so. I had a nice harmonium and I was singing, *Gurudeva daya kar ke* – this is my favourite kirtan. I was singing and singing, getting totally lost . . . and suddenly I hear a bang! The guests had already arrived ten or fifteen minutes ago and I had not heard anything, I was just singing. Swami Atmananda came running and Swami Satsangi. Sri Swamiji was staying in Tribhuvan and he had noticed that they had come. Finally, he sent Swami Satsangi to open the gate and they all came running. By the time I came out, Sri Swamiji had come and left. I felt so stupid. They said nothing but I knew what I had done. I had neglected my duty. That was the thing in Rikhia – you can do anything but do not neglect your duty.

We had a new car and there were shelves above it in the garage. I was told not to go there because we did not want the car to get scratched. One day, I needed something which was right up there. I did not listen, I slipped and fell backwards onto the car. There are many incidents like that. I could write books about that time. You cannot imagine the experiences and it changed my whole life. What I have learnt, I learnt in Rikhia from him, in every way.

It is a gift and it is hard to talk about. When Sri Swamiji started to withdraw himself, I never felt it. He was there, I did not need to see him for a week or even two weeks

because he was there and he is still there. When he left his body, nothing really changed for me. That was the feeling.



In 2009, before the mahasamadhi, I was filming everything during the Yoga Poornima program. He gave a satsang on the last day of the Yoga Poornima, fifteen minutes in Hindi and fifteen minutes in English. He scolded the Rikhia people. Nobody could talk to them like that but he did and they did not mind. They knew that he was talking the truth. Then he spoke in English for fifteen minutes. When I see these satsangs today, I know he knew that he was going. I am 100% sure. In fact, out of the gate he went and that was my last glimpse of his physical form. But nothing changed. Yes, I felt sad, some tears came. I was at that time in Munger. So some tears came, but only very briefly. The next day I was not missing anything. Even if I go to Rikhia now, he is there. I do not miss anything. He had kept himself always quite at a distance so that we do not develop any emotional ties with him. That was his main intention. He did not want any emotional connections to anybody and this was for our sake, not for him. He is with me every day, always. When I do some stupid thing, I think, 'Oh, Swamiji'.

I feel all the shortcomings but I feel his presence with me always. Some people talk about this vision and that vision but with me it is not like that. It was always just a very natural relationship, nothing extraordinary but just that he is a part of me.

SWAMI APAROKSHANANDA SARASWATI

Greece

Swami Aparokshananda was born in 1952 in Alexandria, Egypt. Introduced to Satyananda Yoga in the early 80s, he received poorna sannyasa from Sri Swami Satyananda in 1984. A resident at the Paiania ashram since then, he has been involved in its development from the very start while also being active with teaching Satyananda Yoga around Greece.

During Christmas 1983, I accompanied my mother to an ashram because she wanted to visit Swami Sivamurti who was there at the time. This was the first Satyananda Yoga ashram near Athens. I saw a beautiful photo of Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati and I fell in love. From that moment I felt this deep connection through Swami Sivamurti to Swami Satyananda.

Later that year, Sri Swamiji had a tour in Greece for one and a half month when he visited 16 different cities and islands. This was the first time I saw him. The connection with him was such that something happened in the heart. We had to prepare the tour for him and we also went everywhere with him. The connection was to propagate yoga, this was the aim: to reach more people and bring to them the benefits of yoga.

Sri Swami Satyananda could reach someone from within, not from outside, in a delicate and subtle way. The experiences and the connections with him were not direct but in different ways, sometimes through dreams, sometimes through something else. At that time, I was responsible for

the kitchen and worked from early in the morning till late at night. As a result, I was neglecting my health. Suddenly, I got a message to be ready for Sri Swamiji had to go to the city: get ready to take the car and go. I went into the parking lot and everybody was there. I was told to get inside the car. Sri Swamiji came and so the door to the back seat was opened. The protocol was to arrange everything in the back seat, but he changed everything. He entered the car and sat down in the passenger seat next to the driver, which was me. Then he started to talk to me. The other swamis were sitting in the back. He said, "The engine, the distributor, it has to be fixed. This part of the machine you have to look after," and he proceeded to talk about the entire health system in a subtle way, talking about my health in such a way that nobody else could understand what he was saying. All they could hear is that he was talking about the car! This is the beauty and subtle sensitivity I experienced in him.

Once we were driving towards Athens and there was a traffic jam. Sri Swamiji had to be somewhere for an appointment. The car was an old Suzuki model with only bars, no doors. We were stuck in the traffic, everyone was worrying, we were late, when he suddenly opened the bars and jumped outside, took a few steps, then turned around and smiled at everyone. Everyone also jumped out and followed him. That was the beauty: jumping like a child, a beautiful smile and the playfulness, it was fantastic. Such small things, but powerful.

From the first moment I saw Sri Swamiji in Greece, the connection was there, it was a continuation. When we saw him in Rikhia and even now, I don't see anything different, because there is continuation, whether he is on earth or wherever he is now. This I feel and this is what I live with, and nothing can disturb it or interrupt it. This is the beauty. I do not believe that it has anything to do with me, it is only him.

In 1988, something happened that I have never shared with anyone. On 8.8.1988, in the early morning, I had a dream: I am at a railway station in India. I see Sri Swamiji

walking and I follow him. He goes to the station, sees a railroad car and he enters. As he entered, I also entered. He gave me, not by words, but he gave me the impression that now we are together. The carriage was empty, he opened the trapdoor, looked at me saying, “This is secret, you don’t have to tell anyone.” He went through the trapdoor. Soon after that, other swamis came looking for him and I was there, but I had a certain agreement with Sri Swamiji. I left that place slowly . . . then I woke up, thinking I was still at the railway station. I took a long time to re-orient myself to where I really was, in Athens. This secret we shared together. The next day we heard that on 8.8.1988, he opened the door of the ashram and left. These things stay within, it is a way to communicate and contact each person, each disciple. For each one he has his own way and it is beautiful. This is the connection with him until now.

There is another incident that happened when I was teaching in Salonika. I had two, three classes in the morning, one or two classes in the evening and I travelled to different cities during the week. It was hectic and too much for me though I did not realize it. One time, I went to a certain city and I was exhausted. I had a ticket, I saw an empty railway car without any lights on. I went inside to sit



because I was so tired. I thought, 'If there is another train, I will go there but for now I sit here'. The time passed, 10, 15 minutes, half an hour. I am sitting there with my ticket. Then the machinery starts to work, lights come on and the ticket inspector comes into the carriage, "Your ticket? Where are you going?" I tell him, "Athens," and he says, "This is the one which goes to Athens." I did not know this when I had entered the carriage and the number of the seat was 14. I was sitting in exactly the place I had the ticket for. This was how he was giving beautiful experiences through small things. I started to cry of happiness because these are miracles. He was doing many miracles; we just have to open the eyes to see.

We were in Munger when we heard about the mahasamadhi early in the morning. We left immediately for Rikhia. There was a lot of grief and pain and I felt empty. I was not there during the rituals. I don't know what happened but I found myself near the kitchen. I started crying and emptying myself. Then after that I went to the other side and saw all the rituals. My experience was that. I had become empty and he entered me. Any movement that I did or postures, it was he. This went on for almost a week, it was peculiar but beautiful. He brings happiness to you. When he wants to contact you, he comes but you have to be open. The continuation of Swamiji is Swami Niranjanananda. I don't see anything different and that is why when I see Swami Niranjanananda, I see the way that Sri Swamiji was, doing tricky things but beautifully. It is the same when I come to Munger now. So he never really left. He is still with me.



SWAMI GYANBHIKSHU SARASWATI

India

Swami Gyanbikhshu was born in 1941 in Bihar, India. He first came to the ashram in the early 80s and was initiated into poorna sannyasa in 1983. A resident at Ganga Darshan since 1991, Swami Gyanbikhshu has offered his seva in various departments – guest interface, Head of Yoga Philosophy Department in BYB, conducting yoga shivirs, editing, translations and correspondence.

I was extremely fortunate to be a regular visitor to the ashram in the 1980s, when Swami Niranjan had taken over charge from Sri Swamiji. He had totally immersed himself, always at his desk, dealing with the affairs of the ashram. Sri Swamiji was just watching, moving around and was relaxed. He also used to give satsang. Nobody can imagine today – four hours of satsang daily, 8.30 to 10.30 in the morning and 2.30 to 4.30 in the afternoon. I had only two or three things to do at that time: getting up in the morning, doing kriya yoga for two hours, doing some sweeping, and attending satsang of Sri Swamiji for two hours, three hours, four hours. I had initiation in 1983 and then I went back to my life outside but became a regular visitor to the ashram. One day I got a photo of Sri Swamiji as prasad, he looked so loving, lively and luminous. He just had a simple rudraksha mala, eyes not closed but looking somewhere else, it was so inspiring. The person who gave it to me said, “Keep it carefully.” I had it nicely framed and put it on the



side of my bed. That was the only photo at that time in my room. When I would go out, I would look at the photo. I was receiving something and that something I cannot express. It was so helpful, pacifying, motivating. These words cannot really explain what I felt. Every day before leaving my room, while closing the door or locking it, before leaving for my university department, I would just look at the photo.

Once there was a consignment of books addressed to me which came to the department from some university. The head of the department, who was a senior person, claimed that it belonged to him. I was volatile at that time and dynamic as well. I thought, 'Why is such a senior person behaving like this?' He knew that it did not belong to him. I was SP Singh and he was also SP Singh, and so he claimed it was for him. There was a prefix before my name that was related to my research degree which he did not have. Everybody in the department, we were thirty-seven people in the department, they all knew that the consignment belonged to me. One day I thought, 'I will fight today with him and settle the issue'. Just as I was closing the door, I looked at the photo and I felt as if Sri Swamiji was looking into my eyes saying, "No."

I had no option. Somehow, I had to control myself. I went into the department, the day passed. The second day I said, "Today I will settle." Same thing happened. The moment I was closing the door and looked at the photo . . . Third day I got words from within, 'You are correct but your approach to the problem is wrong. Mend it'. My eyes were opened. I walked to the department, composed myself and called at his residence in a peaceful, quiet mood and I told him, "Sir, actually, these papers belong to me." He just jumped, "Oh

yes, I also think so!” Guidance came to him as well, even though he was not at all related to Sri Swamiji. He gave him good sense and, of course, to me also because fighting in any case is never good. This is what I understand today, but not in those days. I was the first person who would fight and not compromise. I was self-righteous.

There are many people who are initiated from Swami Niranjan or who got initiated from Sri Swamiji, even people living in remote areas of the world. They do not have the opportunity of the ashram. They have just a photo, do the mantra, and they progress in their sadhana. These are the statements made by Sri Swamiji, “I initiated somebody in South America, Africa, they have never visited the ashram since then, and I know they are making good progress.” These were the words of Sri Swamiji.

The following story shows the omniscience of the guru or of a saint. Sri Swamiji spoke many times about the quality of the guru – he is omnipotent, he is omniscient. I have experienced his omniscience. There used to be four hours of satsang. How nice it was to be there in front of Sri Swamiji! Hardly twenty, thirty people and I would try to be in the first line, always. He would talk on everything: yoga, spirituality, tantra but he would also talk with authority and conviction about philosophy, economics, politics, religion, horticulture, every culture. He would speak with such powerful conviction that you could not help but be convinced.

One day he was speaking about the political situations in the world, and I, being a professor of politics, thought, ‘Yes, I know, of course’. It happened to be a question on Communism and I had been a student of Communist philosophy, Marxist philosophy and I was a strong supporter of that philosophy at that time. Somebody asked a question to Sri Swamiji about Soviet Russia, its future, about the system. He said – and I am quoting his words. He said, “Communism? Very fine as a philosophy, but where are the Communists? Where is Communism? If there are no Communists, there can’t be Communism. There must be a

person who will implement and execute the precepts and principles of a particular philosophy.”

I thought, ‘Why is Sri Swamiji talking of these things, if he does not know? He is a sadhu, he should talk on yoga and tantra. Why is he talking about Communism?’ I loved Soviet Russia, I loved Communism, I loved Communist philosophy so I did not like what he was saying. I thought, ‘He is the guru, even if he commits blunders, mistakes, it does not matter’. After a couple of years, in 1989, he proved to have been correct. In 1989 Gorbachov came to power in Soviet Russia and the Communist system disintegrated. I am talking about omniscience, he could see. I was interested in the philosophy, I was interested in politics and still I was blind to it. He knew.



SWAMI VEDANTANANDA SARASWATI

UK/Portugal

Swami Vedantananda was born in 1953 in Surrey, England. She was introduced to Satyananda Yoga in the early 70s and began teaching soon after that. She met Sri Swami Satyananda in 1983 and received mantra diksha from him. In 1985, she received karma sannyasa diksha and later that year she spent some time at the ashram in Greece where she was initiated into poorna sannyasa by Sri Swami Satyananda. From '85 to '89 she taught yoga in Australia and visited BSY each year. For the next decade, she was in London, living and teaching at the Satyananda Yoga Centre. She was appointed Yoga Acharya in 1996 and in 2004, Swami Niranjanananda appointed her as the European Guardian of Yoga. Since 2006, Swami Vedantananda has been living at a retreat centre she has created in Portugal and also travels around Europe conducting yoga seminars. She returns to Munger regularly and facilitates classes as part of the ongoing yoga vidya trainings.

In the early 70s, I was given the first edition of *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha* with the blue and orange stripe cover and I was really touched by the simplicity of the book and the depth as well. In 1983, I found out that Sri Swamiji was coming to London so I decided to go and see him. I remember walking into a hall full of bald, orange-robed people and being a country girl, I thought, 'Oh my God! What is this?' Sri Swamiji came and gave satsang. Often when people speak about their meeting with Swamiji, it is

fireworks and stars, but for me it was really matter of fact. I felt like ‘This is the person I have been waiting to meet all my life’. He answered all my questions without me having to ask them. By lunch time, I found myself in the queue for a private interview. The lady behind me asked if I had seen Sri Swamiji before and I said, “No.” She said, “Well, what are you going to ask him?” I said, “I don’t know.” She said, “Well, ask for a mantra,” so I said, “Thanks very much.” She asked if I knew how to greet him and I said, “No.” She said, “Well just pranam.” “Thank you.” When she asked if I had anything for him and I said, “No, just me.”

Soon it was my turn to go in the door and it was meant to be a private interview. I opened the door and Sri Swamiji was sitting in the middle of the room with Swami Satsangi next to him and there was a wall of orange swamis. I thought, ‘This is supposed to be a private interview! What are all of them doing here?’ At which point, Sri Swamiji burst out laughing. Immediately I knew that he could read my mind and I needed to be careful! Anyway, I asked for mantra and basically that was the turning point in my life.

I had two classes to teach later that evening and I found a distinct change in the quality of the way of I was teaching. It felt like somebody else was doing it, I don’t know how to describe that magic. These were ongoing yoga classes I was giving to people. It is funny because I had never been to a Satyananda Yoga class in my life but this undeniable change was happening. Then my whole life changed, but that is another story. I have never actually been in any formal yoga class with Sri Swamiji but he taught us in so many other ways: through satsang, through example, through ashram life, karma yoga, interaction with other people. He taught us about punctuality. If you were going to a program that was starting at half past five in the morning, unless you were in the room at a quarter past five, the door was locked and you were late. So you were usually only ever late once. I think that is why some of us older swamis are always early, you notice us waiting way before the program starts, we don’t want to miss it!

After that first meeting with Sri Swamiji in 1983, I did not meet him until two years later when he came again to London in 1985 and then in Greece for Guru Poornima. Swami Satsangi was there and she taught us tattwa shuddhi. She was a wonderful transmitter of his energy and his teachings and it was a strong experience. Later the same year, I saw him at Ganga Darshan. Once a year for the next few years I came to Munger because after that time he did not travel. There were big gaps in our meetings but not in our connection.



My first three meetings with Sri Swamiji were in Europe where he was a public figure, giving satsangs and the first Guru Poornima in Greece was incredible. Here at Ganga Darshan when you used to arrive, Sri Swamiji used to greet you. You would go and sit with him. He would be giving satsang in the mornings and you would be always invited to sit in. I think it was an opportunity for him to check you out, see where you were at.

When I first came here, my life had been difficult and I was angry at the time. I used to walk in and give him a big smile. He would just give me a look as if he was really cross with me and I used to think, 'What have I done?' In fact, I realized later that he was reflecting me back to myself through his look because my smile was not necessarily natural. Generally speaking, I am quite cheerful but in those days I was aware that it was perhaps a little disguise. He was able to show me that by reflecting my real feeling back to me. I shed a lot of tears in the first few meetings. I knew where they were coming from but they were very cleansing. Now, there are tears of joy!

The first time I came in 1985, it was with a big group from England along with Swami Pragyamurti. It was also her first visit; she had been a disciple since the 70s and I felt like Swamiji really gave her a good time. We were fortunate to also be able to ride on that. We had satsang every day. I thank Swami Pragyamurti for that. Satsangs used to take place on the lawn outside Kutir and he used to sit in the opening of a tent, very special times.

One evening we were walking to kirtan, a fellow sister and I, and we were walking past Kutir. Sri Swamiji lived in Kutir those days. He called, "Come, come!" so we ran over to the steps and stood there. He said, "Open your mouth," so I opened my mouth and he put a great big gulabjamun in my mouth. "Quickly, quickly! Eat it." I ate it and he said, "Open your mouth again!" and he gave me another one. Then he said, "Off you go! Don't be late." I went into kirtan and I am sure that the smile on my face was just literally from one ear to another. Little moments like that were very special.



My relationship with Sri Swamiji was always a long-distance relationship. I met him in 1983, then I met him again twice in 1985 in Europe. That was also when I came to Ganga Darshan for the first time. I was a seeker and his student. He told me that my spiritual path was to teach yoga and he gave me an opportunity to live a different kind of life, for which I will always be grateful. When I first came to Ganga Darshan, it felt just like home and I adjusted to ashram life very easily. It didn't bother me to be

locked into buildings and it is really nice to be able to turn up three times a day and have a meal cooked for you! I always appreciated my visits. Seeing Sri Swamiji here, he was at home, but also coming to the end of his time, as we later came to know. In 1988, I was living in Australia and I had had a dream the night before which was a little bit disturbing. When I woke up in the morning, I wondered if Sri Swamiji had died. Then we got a phone call that he had left Ganga Darshan, the dream made sense and I felt reassured by it. I was very happy that he could leave all this behind and move onto the next stage of his life. Again, because it was a long-distance relationship, I did not ever feel a parting.

When he moved to Rikhia, it was fantastic to watch how he could create – he has to have had a siddhi to be able to create something from nothing because the first time we went to Rikhia, there was nothing there. Then a little bit later on, he created this amazing space. It was really wonderful to see how his focus had changed, he became more of a bhakta and spoke a lot more about bhakti yoga than he did earlier. A very organic change and we all went along on that wave. The yajnas were amazing, stimulating on all senses. The time when he gave his crystal Shivalingam to Swami Niranjan, I was there. I was sitting just behind him and it was quite an emotional moment. I remember a few of us just sitting there with tears running down our faces, not with sadness but just joy perhaps.

During his mahasamadhi, I was in Portugal and I remember waking up in the morning and looking at my telephone to find a missed call from Swami Pragyamurti at 1.30 in the morning. Thinking that it must be something important. As I was walking towards the yoga room where there was the best signal, I had a text come through and I did not look at it immediately. I suddenly felt Sri Swamiji's presence come into the valley and go. Then I read the text which said that he had taken mahasamadhi and I thought, 'I have been blessed again'. There was never a feeling of



losing anything, he is always in my heart. The connection with him is internal, I can't really put it into words. I don't think that a day goes by without thinking of him and being grateful for that opportunity to grow that he has given us. I am eternally grateful.

For us he was a Master, a genius, a visionary, an inspirer, a scientist, but he always said that he was a disciple. When Swami Sivananda

said, 'Go and teach yoga from door to door and shore to shore', he didn't straight away start a yoga centre or an ashram. He spent eight years travelling and, like any good scientist, he was researching what the needs of society were, what people needed to end their suffering and live a better life. He experimented and he developed a system which was relevant then and is still relevant today and will be in the future. His teachings have definitely stood the test of time and I think they will continue for generations. That always reminds me of his quotes, 'Yoga is not an ancient myth buried in oblivion, it is the inheritance of today and the culture of tomorrow' and 'Yoga will emerge as a mighty world culture and change the course of world events'. Thanks to him, that is happening.

I loved many things about him. I loved his laugh, his hands. I loved the flash of his eyes when he spoke. I loved it when you were in the ashram, you may be sweeping the path and suddenly you would feel something, you looked around and he would be standing there, watching you. I never quite knew what to do in those moments. "Oh. Carry on," he would say and you would carry on sweeping and he was gone. Sometimes he used to come into the offices and

people would run and touch his feet. I did not know quite what to do. I would just carry on typing and probably typing faster. He would come over, look over my shoulder and go. Those were precious moments, bumping into him randomly like that and maybe exchanging a few words.

I became more and more in awe of him during the Rikhia period because his whole being vibrated an energy. It seemed to have removed any intellectual capacity that I had, so if I ever had any interaction with him, I was a babbling idiot. I couldn't string two words together, so I just would bathe in his energy. The fact that we did not have that close physical contact was never a problem after he had withdrawn because he was always internally there.



INDU KAPOOR

India

Born in Vaishali district, in 1948, Indu Kapoor received mantra diksha from Sri Swamiji in 1986 and was initiated by him into karma sannyasa, along with her husband, on Rama Navami 1987, receiving the names 'Sadamangal' and 'Vishwananda'. Both their children have also received mantra diksha from Sri Swamiji. She currently lives in Saharanpur (UP), India.

My husband was a manager with the Indian Tobacco Company (ITC) and in 1986 he was posted to their Munger factory. That was how our family came to live at the Munger ITC campus. I heard about the ashram through a close friend whose husband also was at ITC and I came to the ashram to meet Sri Swamiji in 1986. When I saw him the first time, I just wanted to keep on looking at him. I had never seen or spoken to any sadhu or holy person before that but when I saw Sri Swamiji, I realized that this is how holy people are – peaceful, happy and capable of making one feel comfortable in their presence without having to do anything.

He asked me how come I had gone to see him and when I told him, he said, “Keep coming.” I made an effort to try and visit the ashram as often as possible and each time I felt more and more at home. Sri Swamiji told Ammaji (Swami Dharmashakti) that I should work with her. Ammaji looked after the library in those days and she would ask me to fill in registers, check the inventory and help out with other related

work. She encouraged me to grow in many ways, giving me little bits of invaluable advice on family life and related to spiritual matters. I was able to fully appreciate how special and important her advice was only after many years and I strongly feel that she was a perfect channel for Sri Swamiji's teaching and messages.

Whenever I came to the ashram, I used to cook something and bring it as an offering for Sri Swamiji. Once I had made idli, sambar and chutney. He liked it very much and on a few occasions, he used to ask me to cook in the ashram, either in the kitchen downstairs or on the 6th floor of the Main Building. Once there was a swara yoga course and the participants were finding it hard to adjust to the food in the ashram. Sri Swamiji asked me to cook for them and we all used to eat together along with Sri Swamiji on the 6th floor.

In those days, Sri Swamiji used to give satsang once a week and I managed to attend almost each one. I used to come to the ashram with my little daughter. She also loved it and enjoyed coming with me. During satsang, Sri Swamiji would ask all the children to sit next to him. Though my daughter might not have understood what he was talking about, she used to be thrilled to sit near him.

He was very loving and caring towards everyone. His laughter was so joyous. I also noticed that he did not give direct answers or solutions to your problems but did so in a way where he gave you a chance to work it out for yourself. You did not even have to tell him about anything, he somehow always knew what was on your mind. One day when I asked him for mantra diksha, he laughed out loud. Then he became quite serious and asked me if I really knew what I was asking for. He went on to say that spiritual life is like walking on a razor's edge and I should be prepared for that. On Rama Navami of 1987, my husband and I received karma sannyasa diksha from him. The names he gave us were Vishwananda and Sadamangal. My daughter, Payal, also received mantra diksha from Sri Swamiji and he gave her the name Pragya.

I came from a very sheltered and protected background. He inspired and encouraged me to become independent and self-reliant. Sri Swamiji and Ammaji, both of them, as well as all the other swamis in the ashram made me feel like I was part of the family. When my son was applying for higher education in a bigger city quite far from Munger, Sri Swamiji guided and blessed him. Sri Swamiji also gave him mantra diksha. Around that period, he told me that it was time for me to let my son move out from under my shelter so that he could grow into a tall tree. I have held that golden advice close to my heart.

When my husband was transferred out of Munger, Sri Swamiji invited our family to the ashram for a farewell party. We had a sumptuous meal together and afterwards, we were taken around the terrace for a panoramic view of Munger from the top of the Main Building. Swami Niranjan offered us sweets after the meal. We felt so special and were showered with so much affection. I had requested to have a photograph of Sri Swamiji for our new place. I thought that it would be so good if he signed it and when I asked him, he smiled and said, "What for? You have the protection of the Divine!" Every time I see that picture, his words come back to me, bringing solace and security in trying times and it really does protect our whole family.

Since our next posting was in Kolkata, it was quite convenient to come to Munger from there. As luck would have it, my friend from ITC Munger was also in Kolkata at the same time and the two of us would get on the train and visit for a few days. When we heard that Sri Swamiji had left Munger in 1988, many different emotions came up. I was confused, a bit sad and yet also felt very grateful to have had the privilege of his company and guidance.

Later when he moved to Rikhia, occasionally he would give darshan and somehow my friend and I would get to know about it. Either someone would call from the ashram or we would hear from other people in Kolkata. Both of us would jump onto the train and head to Jasidih. The first

time we had darshan, he looked so different. I started to weep and he simply smiled and said, “What is so important about how I look? Am I not the same?” Of course, he was! Things were very basic in Rikhia in those early days and we used to carry cooked food and fruits with us. After darshan, the food brought by everyone who had come for darshan used to be pooled together and we would all share it, like being on a picnic. Sri Swamiji used to live in a little thatched kutir, like a rishi of yore. Seeing him living in this way was a real privilege, especially in these modern times.

Sri Swamiji knew everything about all aspects of life, not only about yoga and spirituality. He could talk to anyone on any subject and so many times in different satsangs we would hear him offer his views and comments on political, social and scientific topics with deep authority and conviction. He related as easily to a small farmer as he did to an important government official or a business magnate, whether it was with uneducated village women or sophisticated ladies from the cities. This was something which showed me how he viewed and treated each person as being equally important and special. Everyone who came to see him experienced this and each one would leave feeling happy at having received something special from him.

In Rikhia, Sri Swamiji told us that he was not to be bothered by our demands and expectations because he had commenced higher sadhanas requiring absolute focus. We are so fortunate that he gifted us a perfect person to fill his role – Swami Niranjan. We had already been acquainted with him when we were in Munger but after Sri Swamiji transferred his powers and responsibility, we have been nurtured and cared for so well by Swami Niranjan.

When I heard about Sri Swamiji’s mahasamadhi, we were living in Saharanpur and it was not possible to come right away. I did shed a few tears but his protection and guidance has been with me always. I believe that all the good and positive things we have in our life today are because of his blessings.

The most important thing in life is the connection with guru and ashram. We used to go Rikhia for every Sat Chandi Yajna and were there in 2007 for the poornahuti of the 12-year sankalpa to conduct the Rajasooya Yajna. I remember one satsang, much earlier, when Sri Swamiji told us that he was going to host this yajna. He said that even though he was not a king with a gold crown and a throne, he was the Emperor of Yoga and how it had helped thousands of people all over the world. We were so proud to count ourselves as one of his own. Now it is not so easy for me to visit and it has been many years since I last came. I feel so happy to see how everything has grown and become so much bigger. Swami Niranjan is building on that strong foundation laid down by Sri Swamiji. Both of them know exactly what people need as the times change and it is very encouraging to see that so many people find peace and direction through their teachings.

I cannot say very much more except that it is surely God's grace that I was blessed to find Sri Swamiji in this life, to be so inspired by him. I pray that I will be with him in the future as well.



SWAMI CHETAN SHAKTI SARASWATI

Ireland

Swami Chetan Shakti was born in 1962 in Waterford City, Ireland. She first came to Ganga Darshan in 1992 and received poorna sannyasa in 1993. She lived at Ganga Darshan until 2005, when she moved to live in Rikhia until 2010 and was involved in various areas of ashram life. Since 2010, she has been living in Ireland and taking the teachings into the community through her work as a primary school teacher.

I came to the ashram in October 1992 to do the Sannyasa Training course. I had heard about Sri Swami Satyananda before that because I had been attending yoga classes in Ireland for some years. I started with evening classes, one day classes, weekend classes and eventually one week or ten-day courses. I had read some of his books and of course, people had been telling stories about Swami Satyananda.

What struck me most in those days was not actually either the books or the stories but it was the classes. I attended many different asana classes, with different yoga teachers from different countries, from different social backgrounds, with different accents – but the one thing was that every class had the same energy and it was so noticeable. The classes had an energy that was always the same and I used to think, ‘How can the energy in the class be the same?’ It was such a beautiful energy, even though the teachers were so different. Then I realized that the teachers were just channels and they

were channelling an energy that was Sri Swamiji or perhaps something even beyond Sri Swamiji.

I found myself in Munger for the Sannyasa Training course and after about six weeks, Swami Niranjan took us to Rikhia for our first darshan. I did not know what to expect. Many of the people on that course had known Sri Swamiji when he was in Munger, they had had contact with him on the physical level. I had not had anything like that. They would have been karma sannyasins or poorna sannyasins. I was just a greenhorn and like all greenhorns, we were sitting on the bus, yap-yap-yapping, and then we entered the gates of Rikhia. It was like the top of my head was sliced off and there was pure white light. It was an amazing experience, like walking into a different loka, it was like walking into heaven.

We had our darshan and we were introduced to Sri Swamiji. He spoke to us for two hours maybe and then we had lunch and went back. For the first few years of our stay in Munger, it was like that, we would have darshan once a year. We would get up and leave at 3 o'clock in the morning from Munger, drive through the night and we would get to Rikhia for darshan at 7.30 am, and then we would go back again.

In that period, it was a very small ashram. There was only the Akhara and Sukhman Marhi and there were five or six of the older sannyasins living with Sri Swamiji in Rikhia. Our yearly visit to Rikhia was so special. It was really the event of the year for us, just that one-day trip meant so much. After a few years, the building in Rikhia continued so we were able to stay over for a few nights because the accommodation was increasing. That started a new chapter. The first time we stayed in Rikhia, it was like the air was permeated with a consciousness, an all-pervading consciousness, and anybody at that time who was there would tell you that you only needed to want something, to need something and somehow it was provided. That was my experience also.

The first time I went to stay in Rikhia, I had a chesty cough which I used to get every winter and I was a little bit concerned because all the bathrooms and toilets in Rikhia at



that time were outdoors. I thought, ‘How am I going to get up at 3 am and have a bath?’ – you had to use a hand pump for the water – ‘I have a chesty cough, so how will I manage this?’ I thought I will leave everything to Sri Swamiji and see what happens. We got to the ashram and I was offered the only room in the ashram that had an indoor bathroom. I thought, ‘Well, that is the grace of guru!’

We used to give prasad of sweets as the villagers would be going out the gate and I remember the extreme poverty of the people. I had never seen that level of poverty. The girls would typically have ragged dirty worn-out dresses. Oversized because obviously they would be handed down from generation to generation. Very often there was no zip in the back of the dress, no shoes, no socks, no cardigan. The boys would be wearing shirts, with no buttons, grey, handed-down shorts or trousers and that was it. We would be wrapped in our woollies – caps, scarves, sweaters, stockings – and the prasad we were giving was most likely their dinner, probably the only thing they would eat that night. Then Sri Swamiji started helping these children and the villagers around. He told us that he had received a mandate to do this. That was the start of the giving from Rikhia. I think one of the words that I would use to describe Rikhia would be ‘generosity’. The generosity of Sri Swamiji towards

everybody. I also encountered this generosity on a personal level many times.

As the ashram was growing sannyasins used to come from Munger to do seva in Rikhia. Maybe some people who knew about electrical or computers would go there and help out for a few days and then come back to Munger. You always knew who had been called to go to Rikhia the next day because all day round they would be walking around with a big beaming smile on their face. They would be glowing because it was so special to be going to Rikhia. Eventually, as the ashram got bigger, Sri Swamiji decided one year that he would hold the health management courses in Rikhia.

I was called to go there some days in advance to help prepare the rooms for the guests and the students who were coming for the courses. It was June and really, really hot, pre-monsoon time. We were accommodated over the office and it was so hot in that room. I could not sleep; it was like an oven. I thought that maybe I could go downstairs and lie on the floor and get some sleep. I thought, 'No', because I have to get permission to do that. The next day, I wrote a note to the office to please allow me to sleep under the stairs because it was too hot upstairs. I did not realize that the note would go to Sri Swamiji. I thought I was just asking the office. If I had realized, I would not have written that note because we never liked to disturb Sri Swamiji, he was doing his sadhana.

Later that day a swami came to me and said, "Chetan Shakti, tonight there will be a bed put for you outside the Akhara. There will be a mattress, bedsheets, mosquito net, pillows. Everything will be provided. You don't need to do a thing. In the morning, you get up, leave everything and go for breakfast. Every night the bed will be there for you." I was shocked. I had not expected this, I wanted just to sleep on the ground, anywhere cool.

That night there was a bed placed on the grassy area between the Akhara and Raghunath Kutir, mosquito coils, net, mattress, everything laid out. I lay down and I just

could not sleep. I felt so blissful. In those days there was no electricity in Rikhia. The ashram had electricity but since it was near full moon, the lights were switched off. That was Sri Swamiji's area. He did his sadhana in there, he lived in Parna Kutir, Raghunath Kutir, in Akhara. These were all his places and I was there right in the middle, looking up at the starry sky and the moon. I felt so blissful that I did not want to waste one moment by sleeping. Every night that bed was there but I felt, 'My goodness! How generous is Sri Swamiji that for somebody who was just coming to clean rooms and help prepare accommodation he would give so generously'. Like that there have been experiences that have taught me how a master thinks differently and how he cares for everybody.

We had Sat Chandi every year which became our annual trip to Rikhia, such a special part of our year. The more we came to Rikhia, the more difficult it became to leave because it was such a special environment. In those years, Sri Swamiji started what was very close to his heart: the upliftment of the girls in Rikhia and the women because the women were the poorest of the poor, the neglected ones. The girls did not get much education, they were married early, and probably the worst-off people in the society would have been the women, especially the widows.

Sri Swamiji started educating the girls, the kanyas, and calling the widows to the ashram. He said, "I will give them employment because the social status of a person depends on their income and how much they can contribute to the household expenses. They will come here and they will chant the name of God and I will pay them the same wages that a labourer gets for this seva, for this work." So the widows came and they would be chanting *Sri Ram, Jai Ram, Jai Jai Ram*. In the first years when the widows came, they were so shy and introverted. Then over the years you could see how those women opened up, blossomed and expressed their personality, their humanity and became joyful. I will never forget the first Sat Chandi which they attended.

At the end of each Sat Chandi, on the last day there was the wedding of Rama and Sita, and a real couple used to get married during those times. In India traditionally widows would not attend weddings because it was considered bad luck but Sri Swamiji put the widows at the head of the wedding procession. When they first came to the ashram he told them, “You are not allowed to wear white.” He gave them lovely saris to wear and when they came to the ashram, they wore colourful saris. For the wedding procession, he gave them prasad of the most beautiful expensive saris with gold threads that they could never in their lives had imagined that they could be wearing. It was so touching to see these women dressed in the magnificent saris. They were like young girls, skipping around the place, smiling, laughing and so joyful. He transformed them from introverted, shy, suppressed older women into these joyful young girls. That was so touching. It would draw a tear from your eye to see that.

The widows are still there, they are still chanting and we have seen the progression. In the beginning they were chanting just the single mantra and now they have moved on, they are chanting *Hanuman Chalisa* and other chants. These women cannot read, everything is from memory. They are playing different musical instruments and they are keeping a very nice *taal*, or beat, so the quality of their chanting has improved. They still take home their weekly wage, just like other workers.

For the kanyas, the girls of Rikhia, Sri Swamiji provided classes. He adopted the children and he looked after their needs. Initially it was emergency needs – clothing, school books, stationery, pencils – but he told us whatever children come to our school, we will take them as far in their education as they wish to go. As the programs increased in Rikhia, the girls would get outfits. Beautiful outfits of new clothing on all the different festivals of the year and that is still continuing. Basically it reached a point where Sri Swamiji was dressing all of the villagers around Rikhia, even

the fathers would be wearing the batuks' outfits, the outfits given to the children.

Every year we would pack parcels of clothing for the families in Prasad Kutir. It started with a blanket. The villagers lived in mud huts with a bit of straw or branches for the roof. Every year they would get a blanket and initially there would be a list, a computer printout. The sannnyasins in Rikhia went around to all of the villages and they took a census of each village. They knew the name, the age of every member of every family in every village. Sri Swamiji has always done things so *pucca*, so perfectly. He didn't send out things randomly. We got a computer printout of each village and we had to pack a parcel for each family, it was individualized.

We would wrap all of the clothes, an outfit for each member of the family up in a blanket and tie it nicely with the name of that family written on the parcel. Added to that were some cooking utensils. Whatever sweets had been given to the ashram for Sri Swamiji or for the sannnyasins, they would all be brought, toys also. The parcels would be all loaded onto a trailer, they would go out to the village, we would sing kirtan and distribute the parcels. People would come and get their parcel and it was such a big event. These were the early days.

All of my golden memories in life are from Rikhia of that time. There were some golden moments. I think the most special moment was the visit of Swami Chidananda. He was the president of the Divine Life Society and he was Sri Swamiji's gurubhai. He came to visit Sri Swamiji in Rikhia and there was a function to welcome him. A busload of sannnyasins from Munger was sent to attend that program. The bus broke down on the way twice, and we arrived at the end of the program, the program was actually finished. We missed it and were feeling very sad to have missed darshan.

Swami Satsangi told us to go and have lunch. We had lunch and waited. Then we got a message, 'Swamiji will come at 2 o'clock' and we were thinking, 'Which Swamiji will

come?’ Sri Swamiji arrived with Swami Niranjan and Swami Chidananda. It was an amazing experience. To have darshan of one Swamiji is very special but when three of them are together it is incredible. It was like the light turned golden, and the birds were singing and it felt like ancient times, like a very old ancient experience and the purity of it felt like the vedic times. Sri Swamiji and Swami Chidananda were chatting, they were so simple and the banter between them was so beautiful. They were telling us about some of their times together in Rishikesh. It was difficult to leave that. That was my golden moment.

I was in Rikhia during the mahasamadhi and it was so special to be there at that time. There was a sixteen-day Shodashi. It never felt that Sri Swamiji had left. There was no sense of leaving or ending, it was emotionally intense and it was beautiful. There were two birds sitting on the telephone wire just above Swami Niranjan and Swami Satsangi. Two doves used to come every day. We used to look at them and wonder . . .

When Sri Swamiji lived in Rikhia he was doing his sadhana so he kept in isolation, we hardly saw him, we had darshan sometimes but he was more distant from us in those days. After his mahasamadhi, it was like that distance was gone. I feel now that Sri Swamiji is more available because now he is always with us. There are places in Rikhia that have strong associations with him, his Samadhi, Tapovan, the Sarovar – we were lucky enough to have seen him in all these places. But when I see a picture of Swamiji now, it is like he is in that picture. He is looking at us, blessing us. I remember in the later years, what was noticeable about Sri Swamiji whenever he gave darshan, his movements were refined, his hands were always in mudra, and often he was blessing, either with one hand or with both hands. This became his expression and when I see him now in his pictures, it is like he is blessing.

I feel Sri Swamiji is a source of strength and inspiration in my life and he is always there. I talk to him. I ask him to

help me. I know that he always wanted to uplift people, to help people, it was his aim and his work in this world. His ideals were very high. If there were two words I could use to describe what I felt in Rikhia it would be generosity and outpouring of giving and caring, of love and purity. I have never witnessed purity like like Munger and Rikhia anywhere in this world.



SWAMI YOGAJYOTI SARASWATI

Ireland

Swami Yogajyoti was born in 1957 in Cork City, Ireland. Her first visit to Ganga Darshan was in 1992 and she was initiated into poorna sannyasa by Swami Niranjanananda in 1993. From 1993 to 2004 she lived in Ganga Darshan and Rikhia, involved in various ashram activities. Since 2004, she has been living in Ireland teaching yoga as well as participating in the activities of the Satyananda Yoga Academy Europe.

I first heard of Sri Swami Satyananda at a time when I was looking for a direction, for more purpose in my life. I came across a yoga book by Swami Venkateshananda, one of Swami Sivananda's disciples, and in that it spoke about how all the compartments of life could be brought together with this yoga. I thought, 'That could be for someone like me'. I went looking for a teacher and fortunately for me, it was a Satyananda Yoga teacher in Cork where I lived – Swami Sattwamurti who had been in the ashram with Sri Swamiji. My first class was pawanmuktasana part 1. It was not just that it was simple and easy, it was the focus and the precision. You had to become still and quiet and observe, then you could see all the little layers and dimensions. My first class was amazing.

I needed to know a bit more, the whys and the wherefores. I spoke to Swami Sattwamurti and she gave me some of the teaching books in the question-answer form. It

was like the questions in my mind were being answered. I did that for a little more time until it felt like I really needed to go to the source. As it happened, I was coming to yoga just as Sri Swamiji was leaving, that was around 1988. When that decision was clear, to come to Munger and learn this yoga a bit more fully, Swami Niranjan was there. It was a kind of transition time, holding the fort. The swamis who had lived with Sri Swamiji always told stories about him. That was where I began to hear a bit more about him. I had seen the books and the photographs, of course. Then at times, Swami Niranjan would fill in with stories of Sri Swamiji's travels and he would tell of the past with Sri Swamiji. For me, that was where I first started to feel the effect or the hint of Sri Swamiji. When Swami Niranjan spoke of him, it was so alive, full of love and respect. It was simple stuff but it flowed out. I wanted to know more. Life in the ashram was orderly and I liked it.

One morning, Swami Niranjan told us to meet at 5 o'clock at the car park. He piled us all into buses and food was also put in. No one knew where we were going. It was Christmas of 1992 and we went off. It was a good distance. At that time there were no big buildings or anything. As we got out of the bus, Sri Swamiji was there to greet us. He was so delighted to see us, as if he was welcoming his friends. I mean, many of us had never even seen him and yet it was all-encompassing. He was delighted to welcome us and he looked after our needs, telling us where the food could be brought, where the plates could be put. As we started eating, he was walking in, around and among us, just like an ordinary person but you could feel as you came into that space that he included everybody. He gave us time to eat and tidy up.

Then he started talking, we were listening. He was so delighted about his next adventure and the new place. We thought that perhaps he was going to have a nice retired life with people visiting occasionally but it did not quite happen like that. It was the joy that we were all a part of it. It was a new adventure and he was ready for it and we should be

ready for it. Not sitting back, wishing and hoping but be up and doing.

When I was going back in the bus I thought, ‘My goodness, that was Sri Swamiji!’ He was exuding that presence, he was the entire space, he filled it. It was only when we were coming away that I thought of it, the bigness of him, the heart of him: that all-encompassing, that caring, caring for us, many whom he had not even met before. That was something, over the years, that I saw growing. Also what Sri Swamiji had made in Munger, Swami Niranjan was polishing and making it finer. He was also polishing us and not pushing, but clearly saying, ‘Move along, get over your stuff’. It wasn’t that BSY alone was the mission; it was what Sri Swamiji wanted that was the mission and Swami Niranjan had the part to follow and to make it happen. He was doing it to the fullest. He was our example and connection with Sri Swamiji.



I was fortunate because I was sent over to Rikhia again. A group was to go around October or so to prepare for the yajnas, maybe until February of the next year. We were there when Sri Swamiji was there. In the beginning years, it was small, it was in the hundreds that people would come. It was – ‘This is for *my* people’ – when he had got that mandate

about loving his neighbours, they were his. It was the same feeling that I had when I had come for the first time. It was like 'You are my friend', taking you in and the village people were like that for him. It was his joy and his surprise that he was going to give them and there would be gifts for everybody at the yajnas.

When we were preparing the bags, it was not just throwing a lot of things into them. There were a lot of practical things and the precision of putting them in but also always something beautiful, something that would not be totally practical but something extra and uplifting. When the villagers would open the bags, they would feel that joy, that amazingness of what life can bring. When we used to be in that preparation stage, he would come each morning and see how we were, make a joke and there was always something more to be added. Could we re-do that again? He would come through and whatever we were feeling before, we always felt even better afterwards. The years went on, it went into the thousands but even at that time, it was not about charity.

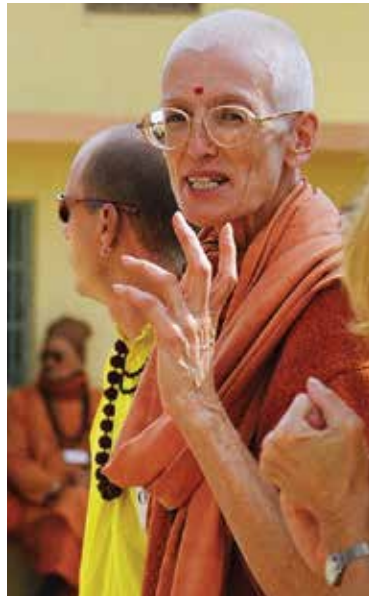
It was like the story about a hungry man, don't give him a fish, give him a fishing rod and teach him to fish. That is what he did, never in an obvious way, but he gave them tools. I could see over the years, the villages that were around Rikhia, really having nothing when we first started.

In 1995, I was there. Swami Niranjan was doing his usual work of keeping track and managing everything with precision. Sri Swamiji was at par with himself and he was not moving about very much at that time. He was the centre, the holding force, and perhaps it was stronger because he was not that actively around. He was sitting and everything seemed to be happening around him. When that moment began, when he started that process, he had already been holding the crystal, eyes closed sometimes, eyes open sometimes, the mantras were going on and it was like he was holding, minding and caring for that crystal. It was a big crystal and he was holding it for a long time while the mantras were being chanted. When he called Swami

Niranjan, he came, as he always did, straight at his feet, listening intently to what he was saying.

In that transfer, it was as if they had gelled together. Swami Niranjan was not there as an ordinary person, but when he looked at Sri Swamiji at that time, it was like he would become totally open and as if it was happening almost physically. He was saying words about the transferring and everything, but Swami Niranjan was not in those words, when he was handing it over. It looked as if there was a flow between them, there was no barrier at all. It was not a long time but the beauty of it, the simplicity and that incredible connection between them. It was just 'This is the symbol of me and this I am giving to you'. It was given and taken in humility and grace. No rushing, no fuss about it but a feeling of flow, of 'Let this come into me'. That was also seen in the way he continued. It was not in a blasé way. It was in a careful and humble way to bring to perfection that which had happened. It was Sri Swamiji and the beauty that he was able to move into someone, someone who was receptive, like Swami Niranjan, who could really open up, was clear inside and could know what was coming towards him and not grab it or go off with it but be able to bring it within and hold it and see what was to be done and how he wanted it to be carried forward.

Everybody who came into the place got a bit of that, in the preparations for the yajnas, in preparation for the gifts that were to be made. Everybody came in whatever mood they were in but then when you came in there, suddenly you were caught. It



did not matter how many hours, how many movements of changing and packing and repacking. You could do nothing else but give, there was no separation. It was our joy also, it was the joy and the flowing that they represented which was for that time. It was always there each year and I think that is what they have given to the world. People who go there feel that joy of giving, the joy of being a part of rather than being 'apart' and carry that back into the world.

Having left the ashram and going back to Ireland was a big transition and unexpected in ways. I thought, 'I am never going to manage this'. In the ashram you had support, the presence, quietly in the background, keeping you on track. I had been quite a few years in the ashram so I had lost track of things outside. Things like mobile phones and internet, all of that technology had come while I was away. I was not so sure how I would manage, back in a different life and it did feel like a different life at that time. One thing that kept me going or was always insistent inside of me was that if I truly believed what I was living in the ashram, if I had been truly living that and if I believed their teachings, it did not matter where I lived. Like Sri Swamiji. He left Munger and then he was in Rikhia and he did not fight the fact that he thought he was going to live a retired life, but it didn't happen like that. People kept coming and kept coming and he saw the need that was there and he tried to fulfil that, he did not fight against it.

For me, it was a glimpse of that. It was not so much about how much I was giving but about I how much I was trying to live that life and bring it in there. Not as I lived it in India but I needed to take time to see outside, what was appropriate, see the changes that had come. And to start slow, as they had always done. Start slow, start steady and gently move into what was appropriate so that I could live fully what I was hoping to live through sannyasa, through teaching yoga. To bring that to people and to bring to them the joy as it had been joyful for me, seeing the joy of those who were much further down the path. Starting with the

base that he had created, with PM1, with PM2, with the *Mahamrityunjaya* mantra, to give a glimpse of the possibility of that. In the background were the examples of Sri Swamiji and Swami Niranjan as they kept going, no matter what the ups and downs were, obstacles are opportunities.

It was always important for me to keep returning, to get recharged, not to fall into, 'Oh, I know all this and I am happy with that' and stagnating but to come back and be renewed and inspired. And then again, bring that back to Ireland. Coming back to Munger, sharing the stories and remembering again, to be able to talk again, and then again I go out full. It's that filling up that they have always given.

During the mahasamadhi, I was in Ireland. It was actually one of the years I didn't make it to Munger or Rikhia. The news came almost instantly. That is the advantage of internet and technology. It was surprising. For all that you know that a person is growing older, but with Sri Swamiji it was like he was always there and he would always be there. Then the news that, 'No, he is gone.' We were contacting each other in Ireland and UK and other places. We all reached out to each other. We were trying to glean through emailing and texting, you know whoever was there, and some of the stories started to filter through about how it had been. So on one level, you had to be delighted for him that he was ready for his next adventure. And hearing how he did it, how he approached it, he could leave the past and then say, 'Fine, I'm on to the next one!' as he always did. There was no fighting it, instead there was the choosing of it. This is my next step and off!

There was also the feeling of sadness that the next time I go to Rikhia, he won't be there. Then I came to Munger sometime after the mahasamadhi. Swami Niranjan and Swami Satsangi were saying that we are not going to let him just vanish away, we are not going to become sad, disillusioned and wishing for him. It is not how he had been. It was more like 'Bring him and keep him, keep the life of him here' and that was what I felt. They had made that transition that it is not an ending, it is just another form

and actually a stronger form. I do not have to wait to go to Rikhia. He is here! What are you waiting for? Every moment you have to be polishing yourself, trying to bring up the joy, the effort. There was joy, there was fun and laughter always, but there was always a steady effort underneath it all of moving towards change, improving, bettering. Although the laughter was there, beyond it there had to be that effort, the commitment, that holding on. Now here was our chance to show that we are really and truly living that or is it just the person that was there and now he is gone and we are lost? Since that time it is a kind of transition that has been happening.

You can see it in Swami Niranjan and in Swami Satsangi. The time that happened in Rikhia where he was transferring his powers, all of those years it was blossoming somewhere and then Swami Niranjan took up that role and cared for us. All these people were weeping but it slipped in that way that Sri Swamiji is still here. When the despondent times come, that little thought comes, 'Is this how he would be?' The example that I am giving of myself feeling despondent, I fall down and I cannot make any more effort, the mind stuff, but then I have to make the effort. There has to be a steady constant effort, joy does not come easily but you have to keep on going. That's the example we have. When we go to the places like the Akhara in Munger, you are stepping into that space, when you go to Rikhia, it is not like you are just going to a shrine of him. It is the same feeling as before, that all-encompassing feeling. It is the same for me in Munger. How can you doubt it? He has just taken maybe a different form but the spirit, which is perhaps more important, is still there, still inspiring and going strong.

It was like a trigger for me when Swami Niranjan put up the Chhaya Samadhi. There was the focus because we do need something to focus on, to hold us. He brought that to us and said that this represents the yoga side of him. Rikhia is another part of his life, but yoga is something that we can do. Here is the treasure, the diamond of it, contained

physically in here. Open that and Swami Niranjan is beginning to show us only the hint of what Sri Swamiji had actually said in his words at that time. Yes, we grasped them, I went out teaching and we were ready to be doing that. Now the light is really being shone on it, that is the diamond. I do not think we really saw or even appreciated the diamond that was there right in front of us. We need to use it as that precious thing, not as just saying, 'We do yoga and everybody does yoga'. Satyananda Yoga, Bihar Yoga is a pure gem and we need to be so aware of that, working with ourselves if we are going to say that we are Satyananda Yoga, Bihar Yoga teachers. Swami Niranjan was talking to us about humility. It is something that needs to be actually known first, as they had known it, as Sri Swamiji meant it to be. That is what yoga is, a pure diamond. I think that is what he has left us, a diamond, and you mind it, you care for it, the gem that you have, and you keep it like that forever. And that is what it is for me.



SWAMI KARUNARATNA SARASWATI

Greece

Swami Karunaratna was born in Bulgaria in 1972. His involvement with Satyananda Yoga began in the mid-90s and he was initiated into poorna sannyasa in 2000. A resident at the ashram in Paiania, he contributes his seva in the IT, construction, maintenance and audio departments.

I first heard about Sri Swami Satyananda from Swami Sivamurti in the Greek ashram. The image and the personality she created in my mind of Sri Swamiji merged and became one when I saw him for the first time in 1995. Before I met him in person, I had beautiful and very vivid dreams which were more real than even reality. It was an amazing experience. I know that when I saw him in dreams, I knew him for sure, absolutely sure.

The first time I met him in 1995 in Rikhia, I just melted. It was not necessary to say any words. It was something really incredible, it was a fantastic experience. Not necessary to talk, not necessary to say anything. At that time, he was doing the panchagni sadhana. People were not allowed to go close to him and I was not disappointed but a little sad that I could not offer pranam to such a great personality. As the day passed and everything finished, I was far away. On the last day, we were leaving and I was sitting on the other side of Sri Swamiji's place. There was the old kitchen and people having their meal there. Suddenly I heard Sri Swamiji

coming from behind and he was telling the people who were around him, “I don’t need guards.” He was walking alone, went in front of the line, took a plate and walked all over the area. I thought, ‘My goodness! He was less than three metres away from me’ and I was happy inside. He went all around and saying to everybody, *Namo Narayana*. He came and sat two metres in front of me. My hair stood on end. He talked with us, we ate, he wished us a good journey and we offered our pranams. I couldn’t believe it! It was not possible but he made it possible. This was my first experience. I never had a personal relationship with Sri Swamiji like some people do, but I always knew that he knows me and I know him. This was enough for me at that stage.

On one of my trips to Rikhia, I was very sick and had high fever with bad body ache. I was given different medicines to bring down the temperature but nothing worked. Three days passed and the swami looking after me asked if I wanted to eat anything. I couldn’t bear to think about food. I had terrible body ache, the bed was very hard and I was thinking, ‘I will never come here again’. It was a terrible time. I thought that I would just fast that day. After 30 minutes the swami returned. He didn’t knock on the door or anything like he usually did, entered the room holding a small tiffin and said, “Want or not, you will eat this because Sri Swamiji has sent his food to you.” I started crying. Of course, I ate it. Then he said, “Sri Swamiji said to take this pill and then you will rest.” I took that pill and slept for 12 hours after that. When I woke up, I was absolutely fine. This was an amazing experience.

During the same trip, we had satsang with Sri Swamiji. Usually when a group comes, everyone is introduced to him. I was sitting there thinking that at least now he will know my name. When Swami Sivamurti started introducing the people, he said, “I know all of you, each and every one of you.” That’s it. I didn’t want any more. I was hesitating in my mind but when he said ‘I know each one of you,’ that was a miracle for me.



Once we were in the kitchen making salty cookies. There were many of us and we were working in batches. Probably thousands of these cookies were made that day. Suddenly I felt to make a few different ones. I made shapes like a heart and I marked them with a fork. I was thinking in my mind, 'If Sri Swamiji is aware of me, and of us, next morning I will get one of these for breakfast tomorrow'. We made the cookies, we gathered them in one pot, they were fried and out in another pot. Next morning, three of these cookies were on my plate at breakfast time. People around me were shocked, they couldn't move. They saw and said, "That is not possible," but it was possible. He made it possible.

There are many stories but the next story is about my personal experience of his greatness, his great awareness about us. A day or two before he took mahasamadhi, we had satsang in the mandir. He was giving his blessings to us. I was one of the cameramen for that satsang, and I observed all the movements. It was beautiful to see how he gave a little time to everyone, to every single one. I was on the camera, watching all the details I could possibly watch on the spot. I loved very much the movements he was doing with his hands.

As the darshan was drawing to a close, people were passing malas for blessing and I saw how he had a relationship with some people. He stretched out his hand, they were giving the malas to him and he was giving them

back. It was so beautiful. There was a swami who was helping as well. I thought I should also take the opportunity and give my mala. I left the camera and went to join the queue, as my turn came I gave the mala to the swami, she gave it to him, he blessed it. As he was going to give it to her, he pulled it up, scanned everyone who was around and then looked at me. He threw it to me and I caught it. This was an absolute connection.

After mahasamadhi, it was difficult for me to accept that such a spirit had left. He has not left; he is with us definitely. He has left Swami Niranjan who is, I could say, a copy of him. He is always inside. I am living in the Greek ashram which he dedicated many years ago. There is no day that Swami Sivamurti does not speak to us about him. Everything is connected with him, so my life is connected with him. It is not a part of our life but we are a part of this big family and it is beautiful to feel this.



SWAMI OMGYANAM SARASWATI

Serbia

Swami Omgyanam was born in 1960 in Novi Sad, in present-day Serbia. She first 'saw' Sri Swamiji in 1988 in a photograph in the book Kundalini Tantra. In 1995, she came to Rikhia and met Sri Swamiji and Swami Niranjanananda for the first time. In 1998, she came to live at Ganga Darshan and was initiated, along with her husband and eight-year old son, into poorna sannyasa on Guru Poornima 1999. They lived at Ganga Darshan for the next ten years, serving in various capacities. In 2008, she embarked on a new phase of sannyasa life when they returned to Serbia. She is currently engaged in teaching yoga and conducts yoga programs across Europe, the Middle East and South America. She also frequently visits the ashrams in India.

I first heard about Sri Swami Satyananda in the mid-eighties. I was a student and a seeker and when I look back, I think I was a serious seeker. I come from Serbia; at that time it was Yugoslavia. There was hard communism and we did not have many opportunities, we were not exposed to many teachings. Books were shared, copied, translated secretly, that was the scene at the time. There was a lot on the spiritual market and there were many gurus, paths, techniques. I had a group of friends and we thought that we were true seekers, arrogant and ready to dismiss the great gurus as not being perfect enough for us. One day my friend was as if on fire, he was trembling. He brought a book *Kundalini Tantra* with an



image of Swami Satyananda on it. He said, "This is the real thing." That was the first image which really started stirring everything from within.

Soon afterwards, there was a seminar of swamis from Bihar School of Yoga in Yugoslavia. Three swamis came from Munger and now when I look back, that was the turning point in my life. I attended the first yoga class and it blew my mind. This yoga put me into a space within myself that I did not know existed. With the same stretching of limbs,

my mind was transported into a higher state which I felt was the closest to the soul I had ever experienced in my life. That seminar was on 1st September 1988.

Nobody knew at the time that a new chapter was starting. Those swamis were sent to contact a new set of students, disciples and maybe sannyasins, who were going to be the foundation of a new chapter of Bihar School of Yoga. I found out about that seminar in the most prominent daily newspaper. The advertisement was in that paper and when I saw the names 'Swami so-and-so Saraswati' I recognized that it was for me though I did not know what 'Swami' was, what 'Saraswati' was, or who sannyasins were, nothing. Just the name was the recognition of the right path. After that, my journey began. I found a teacher, I went to classes, slowly learning yoga and my personal life was shaped around forming a family at that time. I was totally absorbed in that, maybe the most beautiful part of your life is when you have love, a husband and a small baby and you enjoy every bit of it.

I was enjoying my life and everything was going right except for a deeper emptiness. Something was missing in life. On a deeper level there is some longing and some empty space that has to be filled. Attending the classes with my teacher, I heard that a group was planning a journey to India and I was thinking 'Why would I go there? I have my path, my sadhana, my classes, everything here'. Those discussions and their plans disturbed me deeply. Then I became restless to the point that the whole night I was dreaming of people in geru. I woke up tired, exhausted, very much moved and feeling misplaced from my regular life. It was not possible for us to go. Three of us, three tickets, a three-and-a-half-year-old child, war in my country at that time, no food, no milk, no provisions, shops closed, inflation, an abnormal situation – with ten dollars you could survive comfortably. Everyone was afraid and closed in little units. Then I found out that my husband was also having the same dreams and the same exhaustion in the morning.

One day when he said, "Look, we have to talk," I was afraid but I knew he was going to tell me that we should go to India. He said, "I feel filled up with the urge to join the group and I think we should go, all three of us." The money came, the visa came, the passports – we did not have passports. There was a war going on and the name of the country changed. Nobody had a passport and it was a situation called embargo when all other countries cut you off so you could not travel. We had to take a secret night bus to Budapest, Hungary, and take the flight from there. How we got the passports is another long story but it happened in one day, without connections, just like that. So we were on that plane and when we finally came to Rikhia, everything fell into place.

I discovered true life, normal life: this is how people should talk, behave and think. Everything was right. The atmosphere, the energy, the like-minded people in hundreds and the high teaching that I was longing for in life. It was just after Sri Swamiji's panchagni and he was bursting with

life. Those were the days when he wore a kaupin and had long hair. Even his hair was full of prana, shining. His skin was amazing, no wrinkles, every cell was bursting with prana. I had never seen such a person. He was an old man at that time, his body was supposed to be old but he looked younger than all of us. Sri Swamiji, was simply glowing.

My first impression was acceptance: I felt welcome, I felt accepted as I was, I felt loved. I felt that I was really very welcome. That was my strongest impression.

I was attached to Sri Swamiji immediately. I came to the first Sat Chandi Mahayajna in 1995 and that was a special experience. First of all because Swami Nirnanjan received blessings to continue the path that Sri Swamiji started and it was an initiation which we witnessed. How is it possible that in your life you can witness such an event? On the first day of that Sat Chandi Mahayajna Sri Swamiji appeared for satsang. He sat on a tiger skin, it was cold, winter time and he had no clothes. We were all in blankets and coats, jackets. He was sitting and looking at us for quite some time. It seemed to be long. Slowly, slowly, like a camera, watching slowly, moving his head. There were four sections of people, foreigners, sannyasins, Indian devotees and the locals, and he was watching all of us carefully. Then he said, “Yes, I have seen you all as you are sitting now, long before. You are all invited to be here and you are meant to be here.” Then I understood why that urge was so strong and that yearning was so powerful to come.

I was attracted and attached to Sri Swamiji and I developed a relationship with him. In my mind, he was my guru. But Sri Swamiji stated clearly, “I am not your guru. I am not guiding anyone. I am a sadhu, I am doing my sadhana, please don’t come with questions.” He even said, “I deleted my files of yoga, don’t ask me what is shashankasana, what is shankhaprakshalana. Don’t ask me those questions. I am not going to guide you anymore. Please remember this.” I didn’t understand the whole thing of having a guru or not and I had not recognized Swami Nirnanjan. My eyes were

only for Sri Swamiji. I saw only him and I developed a deep connection at that time with him.

There is a most important moment in my relationship with him which was not a pleasant experience – how he cut that tie that I was developing and making stronger. It was when I came as a jignasu sannyasin. I had shaved my head, was involved in seva and I understood better what was going on and what yoga was actually like. I was completely focused on Sri Swamiji. I was constantly thinking about where he is now, where he might be . . . and even in the programs when I was with my friends and having a chat or chai or walking to see the stalls selling malas. All that was a pose for I was fixated on wanting to be near Sri Swamiji and dreaming, feeling and breathing his presence. At that time, he gave an amazing program of one month dedicated to Sri Rama. Every day the program was growing because Sri Swamiji added one satsang after lunch. That was the sweetest point for not many people attended that satsang. It was at Raghunath Kutir, the hut where he lived at that time. It was a restricted area.



At that time, there was no accommodation in Rikhia and there was no Rikhia ashram as such. It was a place of a sadhu with a few swamis. The area of the program was Tapovan area and there was a little green metal door dividing those two realms, the one where the program was held for the people people and the one where the sadhu was doing his panchagni, where he slept and where he was doing his sadhana. He accepted us only after lunch for one hour of informal satsang with few people who were not going back to Deoghar. So that green door was a big barrier, like a border between two countries which is not easy to cross without a passport.

One day something went into my head and I will never understand what happened to me. I quickly swallowed something during lunch time, thinking how I wanted to be the first person at the gate when they announced, "Now you may come in for the satsang." I wanted to be first. I would grab the first spot in front of Sri Swamiji. This was my focus. I came there alone, no one was around, there was just I and that small green gate. I adjusted my outfit so that I looked presentable, I checked my dhoti. Suddenly my head space changed, I became so absent-minded and before I knew it, I had entered the gate. My thoughts went in the direction that I would go and leave my dhoti there, reserve my place . . . It was strictly stated that no one should enter that gate. When I opened the gate, I was still looking at my dhoti checking if everything was right. When my eyes lifted up, I saw Sri Swamiji sitting leisurely, having chai by himself, sitting on a chair with a small table next to him. I almost bumped into him. It was so improper, so bad: some new student, aspiring disciple, some young lady, some jignasu coming into his area, straight onto his path, into the lair of a lion. He looked straight at me and roared. He showed his hands, "Go to Swami Niranjani!" I turned around immediately, I said nothing, I stumbled out of the gate and had a really strong ego crisis.

I felt bad, like never before: shame, embarrassment, fear, sorrow, apologies, my heart opened totally. It was egodectomy

and heart operation at the same time. The whole day and for days after that I felt small, like a little ant. Actually, I did not understand those words. He could have said, “Go out! Get out!” or something like that but no, he said, “Go to Swami Niranjan.” He sent me off to Swamiji.

From that time, I was not brave to follow him and bother him all the time. I was more serene and more serious and my connection with Sri Swamiji started to become deeper but also faded away. It was not so strong and at the same time I started connecting to Swami Niranjan. I had taken jignasu diksha from him and mantra diksha but for me he was just one of the other swamis. Then I started speaking with him, coming to Munger and my life opened up. That was a strong experience with Sri Swamiji. He knew exactly what he was doing.

The scriptures say *jivanmuktas*, realized souls, they know every step. We ordinary people, we do things, what we think are good, what we think we have to do, but *jivanmuktas* know every step of their day, of their life. I understood that in 1988 when Sri Swamiji was leaving Ganga Darshan, he knew he was not going to come back, he knew he was going to go and do sadhana and he knew he would submit everything to his successor. A new chapter was starting. He was preparing the ground by calling people who were ready and those were aspirants from all over the world.

From the first time I came to Sri Swamiji and Swami Niranjan, I heard only one thing – you live yoga. In the first program, they did not show us asana. We did not do pranayama or yoga nidra, we were chanting God’s name. Even in Munger, we were not doing yoga seminars, but we were asked: how do you live, what is your attitude, what are your reactions, what is your attitude to life? If you look into Swami Sivananda’s books, it is the same.

During the mahasamadhi of Sri Swamiji, I was in Munger. It was after the Rikhia programs and one batch of sannyasins came to Munger. The two yajnas were over and we were all back. The night of the mahasamadhi, I was sharing a room with another swami and she was asleep. I was lying on my

bed, feeling unusually restless. I felt like having little birds fluttering in my chest and I wanted to walk, move and do something. My thoughts were scattered, not related, just restlessness on all levels, physical, pranic, emotional, mental, but without reason. I felt an urge to come out of the room. I was listening for some sounds, 'Is an earthquake going to happen? What is wrong with me?' I was listening to what was happening. It was midnight.

Then I heard some commotion, the lift was being used, which is not done at that time of the night. Without thinking, the same as the gate experience, I came out improperly dressed. Odd winter layers but the excitement in my chest was unbearable, my mind was not functioning. I came like a ghost on a string, like a puppet, I came to Kutir. There were already two or three swamis there. I knew something had happened. I knew something great had happened. I thought maybe one of the senior swamis had departed or was having a hard time.

Then it was a thought it is something greater. Someone was getting a car for Swamiji to go to Rikhia. With some swamis, I immediately prepared Jyoti Mandir. We saw Swamiji coming and we knew where he was going. We just prepared the room for akhanda kirtan and we started. This is something that doesn't happen to every person in this life, and it proves that we are all connected more than we think.



SANNYASI DANAVEER

Uruguay

Sannyasi Danaveer, Alberto Nogues Duran, was born in 1973 at Salto, Uruguay. He was first introduced to Satyananda Yoga in 1992 and came to India in 1998 when he had his first darshan of Sri Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjanananda. Since that time, he regularly visited Rikhia for the yajnas and also spent time at the Munger ashram, mainly involved in karma yoga. He participated in the four-month yogic studies course at Munger in 2008. Currently he lives in Montevideo, Uruguay and facilitates yoga classes twice a week.

In 1992, one of my brothers came to do the sannyasa course at Ganga Darshan and started to give classes in Uruguay after he returned. I went to attend a class and as soon as I entered the room, I saw a picture that really impressed me. I did not understand why there was this picture of an old man with a beard in the room. That was the first time I saw Sri Swamiji.

Then in 1998, I came as a tourist to India and another brother of mine, who is a yoga teacher in London, was in Rikhia to attend the Sat Chandi Yajna. He said that I must come to this program and so I did. At that time people were staying in Deoghar and we went to Rikhia every day. So that was the first time I saw Sri Swamiji in person and also Swami Niranjan.

The first time I saw Sri Swamiji, I was pretty sceptical because I was not into yoga. I knew a few postures, that was all. That year I received prasad directly from him. Everyone

received prasad of the *Ramayana* from him. At that moment I did not understand or feel anything. Then, the next day I met Swami Niranjan and something changed when he looked at me. My brother introduced me to him and from that day onwards, I started to feel something different. But I was still quite sceptical. I had never believed in any religion or anything. I did not understand what was going on with all the mantras and chanting all day long. I would go out and have a chai. I was there only because my brother was there. Then something changed and I started to feel that I only wanted to be inside where the program was, no need for chai. Just doing karma yoga. That was the first time I did karma yoga, and I was feeling happy to be there.

After that, I returned for the yajnas every year and met Sri Swamiji each time. After the first yajna, I came to Munger and stayed for a few weeks. I did karma yoga. I started to trust more in how I was, in my feelings about myself and trust more in myself. I was a pretty shy person, not comfortable talking much with people. I did not speak much English either, but karma yoga helped me a lot. When I connected with people, I found that I was very happy to find that ‘this is what I want to do in my life’.

In those days, I was living in Spain. I was starting to do pawanmuktasana because that was the first yoga practice I learnt. I did my mantra japa and then PM 1, 2, 3 and surya namaskara. I applied to do the 2003 Yogic Studies course but my application was received too late. Then I came for the 4-month Yogic Studies course in 2008. I started teaching yoga in Spain, not as a profession, but giving some classes to friends. Now in Uruguay, I am teaching once or twice a week.

I had never planned to do anything like this and I am very happy that I got connected with both Sri Swamiji and Swami Niranjan and with the whole yoga family, *sangha*. It changed my life completely. I was talking with my brother who brought me to Rikhia. I told him that I was kind of lost and did not know what to do with my life. He said, “If you don’t know what to do, then follow somebody who knows what he is doing.”

Once I was doing seva in Rikhia and Sri Swamiji happened to pass by where we were working, bringing water in a tractor for the kitchen from another property. There was a wire lying on the floor because we were using a pump. I put two bricks to hold them down so he could walk easily over them. He looked at me and said, “Don’t worry, I am not an old man!” and he was 83 at that time! That was one of the few times that he spoke directly to me and that is something I keep very close to me.

Another story was around 2003 or 2005. There was a new kitchen and I was the only foreigner working there with all the Indian cooks. I was filling up buckets with vegetables and putting them into the pots on the fire. I was facing backwards and I felt something in my heart. When I turned around, all the cooks were lined up and doing pranam to Sri Swamiji I just ran and joined the line. He had come to look at the new kitchen and after ten seconds, he went away. It was amazing for when he turned around the corner, I felt like as if somebody had just switched off a light. The energy was gone! I can still feel that sensation now . . .

In 2007, there was a very strong feeling when he was giving us blessings. That was the first time I really felt very blessed. I had been before him a few times but this time was something different for me. I was in Spain when I heard that Sri Swamiji had taken mahasamadhi. I was shocked. Whenever I go to Rikhia now I feel his presence. He is alive there. I can feel it. There are times when I have strong dreams where I feel his presence. Namō Narayana, Sri Swamiji!



SWAMI KRIYABHAVA SARASWATI

Australia

Swami Kriyabhava was born in 1977 in Sydney, Australia. She came to Ganga Darshan, Munger, in 1999 for the one-year diploma course at BYB and stayed on for some time in the ashram as a resident. She had her first darshan of Sri Swamiji during that time and went to live in Rikhia as a resident in 2001. Offering her seva with the kanyas and batuks, she lived there for many years, involved in accommodation, editing and program organization.

My first exposure to Sri Swamiji was when I had come to Ganga Darshan in 1999. I don't really know where Sri Swamiji plucked me from because I had never heard of Sri Swamiji, sannyasa or ashram. I had wanted to come to India to learn and to study. I had been drawn to Ganga Darshan. This was the time before internet so I only had a fragmented idea of what I was coming to and sannyasa, people in geru and the guru concept was all very new. During my first week I was quite unsure about the whole thing and was trying to understand.

I remember standing up on the veranda of the fifth floor in Main Building and saying to a sannyasin, "I am really not sure about this. I have a lot of doubts." This sannyasin said to me, "You will learn so much here. Our guru is Sri Swami Satyananda and he is in Rikhia. He is conducting the Rajsooya Yajna." As soon as that person said the name 'Swami Satyananda', I knew that that was why I was here, that he had

called me. Suddenly all my doubts and concerns dropped away because I knew that he had called me for something and that was enough. I moved forward with a clarity that came after that first exposure and the first knowing.

At that time Rikhia was a closed community and Sri Swamiji was in his sadhana, so it was very rare for people to be able to visit, let alone to stay there. But I knew that was where I wanted to go. It was an unspoken wish to be able to visit Rikhia and this was granted because Swami Niranjanji sent me several times. A group would be sent for some specific seva or event and I was fortunate as a student to be sent for a day or two, whether we had darshan or not, and then to come back. That happened several times and each time I was more and more sure that I wanted to be in Rikhia.



The first time I had darshan of Sri Swamiji was in the hospital plot in Rikhia and Swami Chidananda had come to visit him. Both of them were there and we were all sitting on the grass around them. It was a very relaxed interaction. They were talking about world events. That was the first time I saw Sri Swamiji in physical form. It was very special because his physical form was very familiar to me. It did not feel like the first time, he felt very familiar. We had come as a group from Munger and Sri Swamiji gave each one of us an apple. This apple was the most special thing! I think the whole trip



back from Rikhia – we had gone for the day and the roads were not like they are now – I treasured that apple for the entire six-hour journey. I don't think I have ever stretched out the joy of an apple for so long!

After I finished my diploma at Ganga Darshan, I travelled for some time. At every turn, he was there and it became just stronger and stronger. The further I tried to move away, his presence grew stronger and the pull was stronger so it was very clear to me. I was fortunate to have been given permission to go to Rikhia at all and then I went there to stay as a resident in 2001.

It was still a period when it was a closed community. We were 12 residents or so at that time. Sri Swamiji was involved in his sadhana in ekant and it was a period when we were not seeing him very much. His presence was so strong that we didn't need to see him, I never felt the need to see him. There was this total awareness of doing everything we could not to disturb him in his sadhana and that was the whole focus. Every now and then, we were blessed with darshan, sometimes just a glimpse.

The transition to living in a closed small community was very natural for me though I did not have any experience of ashram or anything like that in Australia. There was no thought, there was no mind. It all happened very spontaneously, very naturally. When I was asked later how

I decided to stay, how did I decide to take sannyasa, I don't ever really remember it being a decision as such. It just seemed to happen, it felt right and it unfolded in my life naturally, step by step. It was not something that I consciously went looking for but it was obviously something that I was fortunate to come into. I think I had been on a journey long before I came to the ashram and this was just a continuation of that journey or maybe stepping on the fast-forward button.

I was very fortunate to have seva with the kanyas initially as the work began to grow around Sri Swamiji's sankalpa, and then later with the batuks. When I first came to the project, there were 62 girls registered as kanyas. When Swami Satsangi had told me that I would be working with the children, I was surprised and thought, 'How am I going to teach 62 children?' There were three batches and in each batch there were 20 children. For me this felt like so many and I didn't speak Hindi either at the time. But in my relationship with them, I felt a natural connection and it just flowed. That was the grace of Sri Swamiji and the rest is history. Everybody knows how it went from one to two to 60 and then suddenly it was 500 and it kept growing from there.

That was my connection and experience with his sankalpa at that time. I felt blessed because for me they are his children. People would say, "There are so many. How do you remember them all?" because we had 1,500 at some stage. For me they were his children, each and every one, and they were individuals with so much potential. It was an honour to have contact with them, to be one of the few allowed to interact with them. They were a part of his sadhana and out of respect for that, the interaction was limited and careful. It was not just a charity that we were doing for the villagers and that fundamental principle was clear. The activities were his sadhana and we had to be respectful in our interactions, whether it was with the village, the children or the recipients of prasada. Being a part of his sankalpa and his sadhana, all our actions were done with that reverence. It was amazing to see how it grew.

Sri Swamiji was all-encompassing and I definitely can understand when people speak about the expanded consciousness which he expressed during and after completing his panchagni sadhana. I can certainly say that within my own inner experience, I have experienced it. Even before the mahasamadhi, he had that place. When he left the physical body, it was not a jarring adjustment for me. There already was that unspoken connection with him and for me it was through seva and through those periods that the inner connection developed. We grew within it, not be dependent on his physical form. Obviously after the mahasamadhi, this experience grew exponentially but I do feel that the groundwork had been laid in the way we were trained in the ashram, in the way that seva was conducted. That bond or that connection was already solidified or established.

I have my own personal memories of the time and that period of his mahasamadhi, but I also feel that it was a time where all the training and all the hard work fell into place. I saw that not only within myself but within the whole community, with Swami Satsangi, Swami Niranjan. It was like everybody knew exactly what to do, without talk, without discussion, without debate. I knew what was expected of me during that Shodashi period, the sixteen-day ceremonies. I knew what I was to carry, it just came through me and I also saw that coming through everybody else. It was really a period of obviously personal experiences but a strong sense of connection with everybody who was there at that time, through that intuitive knowing of what to do in an impossible situation, which is a situation that I could not have prepared myself for, and I doubt anybody could have. That time there was a sense of knowing what was the right thing to do or to be done.

From 2001 to this time, I am constantly surprised how Rikhia can somehow absorb change so spontaneously and so naturally. One day there was a plain field, then obviously after huge dedication and effort, there is a building but it feels as though it was always there. That is my experience of the

constant change and evolution. Rikhia just organically seems to be able to absorb that transformation. I see that with the people coming and going, I see that with the huge changes in the landscape, in the properties. It has this capacity to change, to transform and to always seem right, as though it always was there. I think that is the fluidity of a space and a place that is not stuck in time. It is constantly evolving, changing, able to meet the changing needs of people.

That is what Rikhia is and that is what Sri Swamiji gave because of his vision that the needs of people change. Times are changing and it is not stuck because he was never stuck in his teachings or in himself. He was constantly able to transform or digest, to give people the teachings in a way that they were able to understand, absorb and receive. I think that is the spirit of Rikhia also. You step in and you feel that is what it was. At Ganga Darshan, the essence is the same and that is the innate strength. There are physical changes all around but it is still rock solid at the centre. The essence is the same because Sri Swamiji is here. It is his place and everything around it is around him and his teachings, the essence of him is felt so strongly. You can see, year after year, people are drawn, they swarm to get a taste of that, to experience that. It is there and it is also not just within the walls of the ashram. He has permeated the whole area.

In Rikhia panchayat, he was loved by the villagers. At the time of the mahasamadhi, I saw the outpouring of love from the villagers. Village mentality is different; they do not accept outside people so easily but they loved him as their own. To see an outpouring from men, women, children as though one of their own had left the body: that for me was the pinnacle. To see that the love he had poured out to them was reciprocated equally and beyond, for me that was really touching. I see that as a major achievement, particularly in his life, the affection that he received from people from all walks of life, from all countries and from all corners. I saw how he was able to connect and touch the lives of so many people and of everybody.

People say about his satsangs that everybody walked out feeling that they had been spoken to, they had got the answer that they had come seeking. It was really special to hear people's experiences after his satsangs. Everybody got something and that was amazing.

He was very practical. When I think of our time with him Rikhia, we had the satsangs, we had darshan but my personal experience of him was that he was very practical. I saw the growth of the ashram and the different activities or the different projects that were developed over that time – they all had a practical foundation. He was practical and logical and that really struck me. People have high-flying ideas and want to implement big things but he really laid strong foundations and went from A to B to C. His attention for detail was what really struck me in that period.

An incident stands out from when we were building the Yajñashala. I think there were hundreds around, painters, tilers, electricians and we all were called from our various departments. There must have been a program coming up and the construction had to be completed. I was there painting the green grills of the windows and I was loving it. It was a hive of activity, there were so many things going on. When the tilers finished laying the last tile, the polishers started polishing, it was literally one on top of the other.

At some point, Sri Swamiji stepped in with his hands on his hips and scanned the room. I was watching how he absorbed it all, taking in every detail. He kept looking and he was silent, he just looked. Tilers, polishers, painters . . . and then he stopped. He walked straight to the far corner and I was watching him. Somebody was standing there, a karma yogi, he was maybe also painting the window. Sri Swamiji went straight to this person and said, "Why aren't you wearing shoes?" He said, "Swamiji, they are broken." Sri Swamiji went, "Satsangi! This man needs some shoes. Now!"

Out of everything that was happening, for him the most important and first thing was that this person got a pair of shoes. Only after that, he proceeded to give instructions of

intricate details of every kind because he was fully involved at that time. He could see what was the need, what was the priority. It was all urgent, but for him, in that moment, the human being was the priority. He was concerned that something could harm him. A brick or nail could hurt his foot while all of us were painting green bars on the window and our perception was so different. He was following details, nothing escaped him, but he could prioritize and he always put people first. That is a strong memory for me because it is rare.

That was the learning in Rikhia. It was 'never sit down in a classroom and learn things'. I feel very blessed for those times because we were able to absorb him in ourselves. It was karma yoga; it was seva. There was no yoga, there was no class, there was nothing like that. It was karma yoga and through that, we were able to absorb naturally, spontaneously. I hope it is all in there somewhere, even a small piece of it. It was a special time for me and I think that it was a special time in the evolution of the place. It went from being a closed community and a place of tapasya and then when Sri Swamiji did open the doors, the world came to Rikhia. The fruits of the tapasya were distributed and they keep being distributed to this day . . .

There is also a huge change in the people because Sri Swamiji was not just giving prasad, not just blankets, he was giving people self-worth. I think if you can give that to somebody, you've changed their world. You have not only changed their world, but you have changed the world for generations to come. He was not in a hurry. People used to come with great inspiration, but he went step by step. He had a vision for three generations, minimum, in relation to the kanyas.

He has created a revolution in Rikhia and he has done it quietly. He did not stand up, scream and shout but he turned society upside down, starting with the lowest of the low. The kanyas are performing pooja, he made them into devis and that is a revolution. That is not something easy and it is only something a master can do. They shine and now they come

with their children and as mothers, they are going to demand something more for their children. They want their children to be educated, they expect good standards of living and you awaken a generation who will fight for it for their own children. That is the seed that he has planted. He lives in all of them. Even the children in Rikhia who never saw him, they love him. He has become part of the fabric of that society and that culture and that will live on, that love that he showed for them lives on. The children have a confidence in themselves and that comes from being loved in the way he loved them.



The potential of the children is amazing. They learn so fast, they are like a sponge. I think that is what drew Sri Swamiji to that area. There is a purity in the land and in the mentality of the people. It is harder in a city or in a developed area where people have many more preconceived ideas. There they were more receptive and that really shone out. His final satsang in 2009 during Yoga Poornima with all the villagers was like a pinnacle in his association with them. When he first came and he started giving blankets, people could come and say, “I want a sari or I want this or that.” He gave a cow, a house, whatever they needed. He was giving and giving and giving all through that period.

The way he spoke with them and to them in that final satsang, they were applauding and he was teaching them and I saw that as such a pinnacle of achievement in his life

and association with them. From the beginning until the point that they became receptive to his teachings, that is how I perceived that last satsang, the greatness of him in that moment. These people without exposure to anything, most of them illiterate, uneducated, and over the years they have given their trust. Their trust with their life, with their children, with everything. He could speak to them very openly and honestly, in their language. They were his family and they could see him for what he really was. I recognize that as very special. They knew what he had done and they had seen the transformation in their own children, they could see the light in their eyes. They were exposed to things beyond their imagination.

The children are proud to come with their parents and show them 'their ashram'. Initially these were conservative communities and in rural areas girls often do not even leave the family home, let alone walk across through other villages to come to the ashram. That was a huge show of trust that they had in him and in the ashram to send their girls. Not only send the girls, they would literally put children through the gate when we were doing registration, 'Please take our child!' They had huge respect and trust in Sri Swamiji.

It is an immense legacy and we will continue to see it unfold for generations to come. His vision is so vast; I cannot even begin to perceive it. That was always my understanding, that he was beyond intellect, he was beyond understanding, he was an experience and for me that was it. I could only understand from my own inner experience and perception. I always knew that I was lucky, I always felt it and I continue to feel it. I have something in life that is a precious jewel. I hold it tight and I feel like I can walk anywhere and I have a strength in that. I feel that it is also something that you cannot explain. It is something precious and it is based on love and trust. It is my experience that it was never an intellectual connection, it was never about anything else other than knowing deep within the heart that it was the right place and right time.

Sometimes it feels like yesterday and then at other times I have to count the years. It is a timeless experience, a timeless period. It goes on growing. It is still unfolding within myself, my understanding is still growing, my connection is still growing. I don't feel like it is something finite. There was nothing finite within Sri Swamiji and I feel in our relating to him, there is no beginning and no end. When I first saw him, he felt familiar. I continue to feel that closeness and proximity, it is something I hope to develop further. There was not so much thinking about it, it was all-consuming.

You were swimming in the ocean but like a fish in a fishbowl, you don't even know that you are in the ocean. I think that was what it was like to be in the presence of Sri Swamiji. You almost don't realize the grace that you are living with. You are just doing what is needed. Sri Swamiji was doing his thing and I was doing my thing, which was whatever duty I was given at the time, but there was that fierce knowing that it was somehow completely connected. I think it works both ways. There has to be an openness and that is my hope, that I can stay open with receptivity. From his side, I think that there is no limit. It just flows. It is up to us to keep the pot empty, clean the rubbish and turned it up. From his side, he was an ocean of love, he gave and gave and continues to give.



SANNYASI GYANMITRA

Australia

Sannyasi Gyanmitra was born in 1970 in Melbourne, Australia. She participated in the 4-month Yogic Studies Course at the Bihar School of Yoga (BSY) in 2003. In 2004–2005, she completed the one-year Diploma in Applied Yogic Sciences at Bihar Yoga Bharati (BYB). A participant of the Sannyasa Training conducted in Munger by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati from 2012 to 2014, she has also offered her seva at Rikhiapeeth for long periods of time. She received mantra diksha from Swami Niranjanananda in 2003, jignasu diksha in 2004 and was initiated into karma sannyasa in 2005.

I knew nothing whatsoever about Bihar School of Yoga or even much about yoga. While travelling in India in 2000, I attended some yoga classes in Rishikesh, and our teacher told me that Bihar School of Yoga was the best place in India to study yoga.

So in 2003, I was a student on the 4-month Yogic Studies Course in Munger and I loved it from the outset. When we were being sent to Rikhia for seva in the lead-up to the yajna, I had no idea what ‘Rikhia’ was. We got there and immersed in the seva. One day, we were called to Tapowan where we were lined up and told to keep quiet. After what seemed like quite a long wait, I asked someone, “What are we waiting for?” They replied, “We’re having darshan.” I asked, “What’s darshan?” and they said, “We are going to see Sri Swami Satyananda.”

That first darshan of Sri Swamiji changed my life. How to describe that feeling of walking through the gate from Tapowan to Akhara where he was seated, being in his presence, being blessed by him as each of us filed past quietly? It was as if the floor was pulled away from beneath my feet, the world I had known and believed in fell away and I hurtled headlong into a whole different dimension of existence I could never have thought possible. And that was just the beginning.

In 2004–2005, I did the one-year Diploma course in Applied Yogic Sciences in Munger. During that period, we had several trips to Rikhia for seva. I fell in love with Rikhia, so much so that I wanted to live there. I could not see the point of sitting in lectures in Munger every day when I could be doing seva in Rikhia. After completing the course, when I applied to stay in Rikhia and my request was accepted, I was so happy. I knew I had to be there.

I arrived in Rikhia in the heat of June in 2005. There was a lot to learn and it was so different from being a student in Munger. Sometimes Sri Swamiji would be on his rounds, looking into things like construction or the kitchen, and the buzz would go around the ashram “Sri Swamiji is out!” There would be such excitement at just getting a glimpse of him: going through the gate or chatting and laughing with someone or giving instructions about the work. Best of all was when we were cleaning the pooja area which is now the Samadhi Sthal. Sri Swamiji would emerge from Ganesh Kutir and just watch us, standing in his customary stance, hand on hip. You could feel his gaze penetrating right through you, knowing absolutely everything about you.

Requests sent by people to meet Sri Swamiji were replied to along the lines that Sri Swami Satyananda was in *ekant*, solitude, and did not meet anyone. If they wanted darshan, they would have to take a chance. Yet he was surprisingly available during darshan with small groups or an occasional Sunday satsang in Ganesh Kutir. It was clear that these meetings were for the guests and not the residents, but

sometimes we would attend, on rotation for five minutes or so. Though it was only five minutes, something precious was received each time, you heard exactly what you needed to. Once when we had a rare Sunday afternoon off or chutti, he firmly said, “Chutti means change of duty.” I have always understood the idea of ‘resting’ differently since then. Another time he was telling us about how he lived, just like the villagers did, under the same conditions. There were no fans in Rikhia in those days and he was telling how people think fans are a necessity but we didn’t have them since the villagers didn’t have them. He thundered, “Human beings are weak! Human beings are weak!” Now when I see fans being used needlessly in the ashram, I hear his voice resounding within me, ‘Human beings are weak!’

Other times, he would talk to the guests who would all be introduced to him. His recall of their family and personal situations was incredible. Even if he had not seen them for years, he would enquire after their son or daughter and remember their study or work. He made everyone feel so special. Sometimes Sri Swamiji would come to programs in Yajñashala, which would be packed to capacity, especially during Jhoolan. The villagers would come in droves and there would be hours and hours of kirtan in the hot sweaty hall. Sri Swamiji was ever joyous, he loved every aspect of life and people would become intoxicated in his presence.

The best darshans were when Swami Niranjana would come to Rikhia. Swami Satsangi and Swami Niranjana would be seated at the feet of Sri Swamiji in Ganesh Kutir and I would see them as a veritable triumvirate of energy, a shakti triangle, and Swami Niranjana as the perfect disciple. In Sri Swamiji’s presence, he had a childlike innocence, total devotion and surrender.

Sri Swamiji’s care was always so evident and personalized in everything – inspecting the prasada packing in Yajñashala before Sat Chandi, the development of the kanyas, the wellbeing of the villagers as well as everyone in the ashram. During my second year in Rikhia, I was getting overwhelmed

by the constant workload and wondering why I had so many duties. One day, my in-charge told me that Sri Swamiji had said, “Gyanmitra has an excess of mental energy and needs to be kept engaged at all times.” That made all the duties and exhaustion feel so much better, knowing that it was for my own good.

During the Sat Chandi Yajna in 2006, I was in Computer Office and worked relentlessly, day and night. I could think of nothing else but the work. Though the yajna was just close by in Tapowan, I never went to attend the program. One afternoon a sudden urge overcame me and I grabbed the one person in the office who had been a steady supporter at work. “Come, we’re going to program!” We were seated quite close to Sri Swamiji when he went into a state of samadhi despite the thousands of people gathered there. All the senior disciples swarmed to him like bees to nectar. It was like they were instantly transported by that tremendous surge of energy emanating from Sri Swamiji, arms raised, basking in the radiance of that luminosity.

In 2009, I decided that I should resume ‘normal life’ and needed to get a job. Jobs in my field were scarce. The thought came to go back to India but I had no money. I considered asking my sister if she would loan me \$2000, but was reluctant to ask for help. One day out of the blue, she asked me, “Are you thinking of going to India? Do you need to borrow some money?” Surprised, I said, “Yes.” She said, “I could loan you \$2000, but probably not more than that.” I couldn’t believe it!

Within a couple of weeks, I was back in Rikhia. Before I left, I had called a company with whom I had a job interview a few weeks back, as a courtesy, to let them know that I was withdrawing my application explaining the reasons. The lady called me back later the day saying that they were ready to hold the position for me until I returned from India next January. I couldn’t believe it! Everything was taken care of and I could go to Rikhia without worrying about finding a job or repaying my sister.

October and November 2009 flew by with the usual intensity of seva before the yajnas. It had been two years and I was so happy to be back in Rikhia. It felt like being home. On the night of the mahasamadhi, I had woken up from a prophetic dream in which Sri Swamiji had left me something of great value, to be nurtured and treasured for life. The next morning, I headed out early for duty. It was again that moment of stepping through the gate from Tapowan to Akhara and I was hit with the knowing that 'Sri Swamiji's gone'.

Seeing all the activity in Akhara with lights and voices when it should have been dark and quiet, I realized that this had been going on for hours. It was not just another normal day. A sannyasin passed me and said simply, "No class. Program in Yajnishala." Of course I knew deep down that Sri Swamiji was indeed gone, although at that time I had no inkling of the spectacular way in which he had 'left'. It wasn't until quite a few hours later that the inner 'knowing' was externally validated, when someone mentioned to me, almost as an aside, "The burial will be at 4 pm." Until then, nothing had been said. Everyone was just going around doing whatever they had to but kind of shell-shocked.

As the day rolled on, we all knew the duties and got on with it, there was no concept of 'self'. People started flooding in, the phones did not stop ringing, rooms had not been cleaned after the yajnas. By the time of the bhusamadhi, there was no holding back the throngs of people desperate for a last darshan of their beloved Gurudev. I recall one very special moment in the morning when all the residents were being called to Tulsi Kutir for darshan of Sri Swamiji. Since I was no longer living in Rikhia full-time, I thought that I would not be included and I kept on with the office work until someone came to call me. I could go to Tulsi Kutir! It was at the end and even the sannyasins on duty had left. There I was, alone with Sri Swamiji in Tulsi Kutir, doing full pranam before him on the floor. Again I was hit

with that feeling, something like the first darshan, which is quite indescribable, yet completely undeniable, something much bigger and more expansive than one could ever have imagined – the massive quantum of energy radiating from his physical form, the feeling of being utterly and eternally blessed.

After the Shodashi program was over, I was asked to transcribe the last satsang Sri Swamiji gave during Yoga Poornima. All these words were even more precious now. At the end of the recording, there was something almost imperceptible, I couldn't quite make out. I played it over and over, listening intently, when finally, it became clear that Sri Swamiji had very quietly ended with, "And if you call me, I will come."

Later, my in-charge asked me, "Gyanmitra! What's this?" pointing at the final sentence. I could only shrug and say, "Well that's what he said." She did not believe me until I got her to listen to it. She replayed it a few times until that same dawning realization hit her that this was in fact what he had said. Those were the final words that Sri Swamiji had spoken publicly – 'And if you call me, I will come'. Those words have always stayed with me and I have total belief in them.

I had accepted long ago that Swamiji had won over my heart, yet how did he manage to influence my sister that she would ask those questions which got me to Rikhia for his mahasamadhi? I recalled the night of the 5th, there were very few people left in Rikhia. Just days earlier, there were thousands. and now there were perhaps about 120 people in the ashram that night. Out of a world population of over 6 billion, I was one of them – even my numerate mind could not make sense of that one.

I returned to Munger for the three year Sannyasa Training from 2012 to 2014, but spent more than half that time in Rikhia. It was as if Sri Swamiji was still there, perhaps even more strongly, the feeling of his presence and all the activities so evidently being guided by his sankalpas.

One of my favourite duties was Sarovar sound duty. The Mahamrityunjaya mantra had been playing at the Samadhi Sthal as well as in Sarovar continuously since mahasamadhi. There was a daytime and night-time volume, so before breakfast I would head down to Sarovar to turn the volume up, and around dinnertime go to turn it down. It was a special time: alone in the quiet and still environment of Sarovar to hear Sri Swamiji's voice and to be near Tulsi Kutir, that daily reminder of the enormity of his final attainment and the memory of that special darshan after his mahasamadhi.

Back in Australia after the Sannyasa Training, Sri Swamiji surprised me yet again. Someone had returned from Munger and brought back some prasad, the Chhaya Samadhi booklet was part of it. I was totally captivated! The concept of the strength of the diamond contained in the softness of the lotus, the design, the colours, the dedication of Swami Niranjan to create such an astounding monument to his Guru, all that re-ignited something in me.

I was planning to go to Rikhia for Guru Poornima 2016, and almost as an afterthought, I wrote to Munger requesting to come for Chhaya Samadhi darshan. When I made that visit, I knew I had to come to live in Munger again. I saw the Chhaya Samadhi as the 'Beacon of Remembrance', visible in so many ways, from various locations in the ashram, in different shades of light – most of all, it felt like Sri Swamiji was 'alive' there in a way I had never recognized or felt in Munger before.

I had only related Sri Swamiji with Rikhia but there literally was a 'shadow samadhi' in Ganga Darshan, and it drew me in, as Sri Swamiji always had. I am reminded of the kirtan:

Like a full force gale, I was lifted up again,
Lifted by your grace, Satyananda.

I feel that whenever I have gone astray or deviated from my purpose, Sri Swamiji has literally picked me up and put

me back on track again, just as his grace has surely lifted countless lives worldwide. May it continue to do so, life after life. Jaya Gurudev!



HIS BEST ROLE

When you begin to make the effort then divine grace or guru's grace definitely guides you in the form of inspiration, and it is this inspiration which I have seen in Sri Swamiji's life and which I get from him, too. It is this inspiration which counts the most. I have had the opportunity to see Sri Swamiji in every role: in the role of administrator, in the role of teacher, in the role of a guru, but the best role I have seen him enact is that of an inspirer who has taught that no matter how many times you fall, always get up smiling and laughing and continue walking; do not cry. This is the inspiration which we should derive in our own life through the practices of yoga.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*
August 1994, Mumbai



In *Our Inspirer: An Offering of Love*, devotees and aspirants from around the world have offered personal recollections of their relationship with Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati, who founded the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, and established Rikhiapeeth, Jharkhand. As the authors describe their life-changing encounter and connection, it is the sentiments of gratitude and inspiration that are brought to life and touch the hearts of readers.

Our Inspirer: An Offering of Love is dedicated to the memory of Sri Swami Satyananda and to all those aspirants who came in contact with him. It is also dedicated to future generations who have not had the privilege of knowing Sri Swami Satyananda personally, but who will be inspired to tread the path he has shown.

I will inspire you and that inspiration is love.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

